

**COUNSELLOR IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
ACCOUNT OF EMERGENT COUNSELLOR IDENTITY**

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*You can never speak up too often for the love of all things.
For every living thing or natural place on earth, there is someone
who wants to kill or destroy it;
Therefore, you can never speak up too often for the love of all things.*
Paul Fleischman (2004, p. 11)

Abstract

In New Zealand counselling degree programmes there is a focus on skill development within social learning environments, yet there is limited autoethnographic research exploring the identity development of trainee and beginning counsellors within social learning systems. This autoethnographic research uses Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) framework to show how practices within social learning systems influenced my own identity development as a counsellor, and how the reflective and reflexive practices of supervision, poetry reading, and meditation, enabled counter-narratives to emerge, which enabled me to develop and/or transform my identity as a counsellor.

Counselling social learning systems enabled me to negotiate the meaning of practices, and develop an identity of competence, an identity of participation, and construct a future identity as a counsellor. Some counselling social learning systems were very challenging and within them I developed an identity of non-participation, and felt powerless and incompetent. Reflective and reflexive practices enabled me to reexamine my experiences in social learning systems and consequently I was able to develop and/or transform my identity as a counsellor. Through supervision and the introspective practices of meditation and reading of poetry I strengthened an identity of competence, increased my awareness of how I was being influenced by social learning systems and how my own practices influenced them in return, and was able to view situations from changed perspectives. My identity as a counsellor emerged from the dynamic interplay between experiences in social learning systems, and reflective and reflexive practices.

Chapter One: Introduction

Beginnings

My journey as an adult student began when the National Government signaled that the option to upgrade a teaching diploma to a degree would be discontinued from July 2010. I was in full-time employment as a child advocate at the time – researching systemic blocks to children’s rights within New Zealand. The role taught me that no matter how well constructed a system was, it often relied on the emotional competence of the people within it. The protection of children’s rights lay (usually) in one person’s ability to stand up for those rights when all other people were not able to, or not interested in doing so. In short, it came down to the courage of the individual.

Realising the potential benefits of upgrading my teaching qualification to a degree, I resigned my role and returned to study after a break of nearly 20 years. While completing my studies I volunteered at Lifeline, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I knew that counselling was what I wanted to do with my future and applied to join the University of Canterbury Master of Counselling programme. Throughout the programme I became interested in exploring the impact of social experiences on my counsellor identity development. I also became aware of the degree to which my reflective and reflexive practices were supporting me to explore and/or transform these social experiences, leading to subsequent shifts in my identity.

Currently I hold full teacher registration with the Education Council and I am employed in a permanent counsellor position in a New Zealand (NZ) high school. The full-time role involves counselling students in Years 9-13.

This research describes how practices within social learning systems influence my identity development, and how reflective and reflexive practices enable counter-narratives to emerge, which enable me to develop and/or transform my identity as a counsellor. In this chapter I provide a context for counsellor education within New Zealand universities beginning with an overview of the Master of Counselling programme at the University of Canterbury. I also provide an outline of the components of a social learning system that I will focus on in this research. The chapter concludes with my research questions.

Context

In New Zealand, four universities offer a Master of Counselling degree. These degrees can be completed either full or part-time and involve study in core and elective courses, and research - either as a portfolio or thesis. After obtaining skills and theoretical knowledge through the university, skill development primarily occurs within counselling placements. Students are supervised by an on-site qualified counsellor with university staff either overseeing the placement or providing administrative support. In addition, students who want to become members of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) are also required to pay for regular external supervision with a qualified NZAC supervisor. Supervisors support the student counsellor to engage in reflective and reflexive practices, which helps to develop skill acquisition and a professional identity.

The University of Canterbury has provided counsellor training in various forms since 1973. In recent years it has offered the Master of Education with a Certificate in Counselling as a limited

entry course. Each year a cohort of up to twelve students began the course, completing it as either full-time or part-time students. Then in 2013, the University offered the inaugural Master of Counselling programme - a two year programme through the School of Health Sciences. Instead of weekly classes, that had been basis of the Master of Education with a Certificate in Counselling, it was redesigned and primarily offered as a series of block courses: this better met the needs of distance students. Courses were designed to provide both a theoretical framework and a set of professional skills from which to practice as a counsellor. The compulsory courses in the first year are: Theories of Group and Family Counselling, Solution Focused Theory and Skills, Professional Counselling Practice, and Counselling and Psychology: Theories and Skills. In addition, to meet the programme requirements of one research paper, and one other education based paper, I chose Introduction to Methodologies and Ethics in Education Research, and Emergent Research Methodologies. In my second year I enrolled in the compulsory Professional Counselling Practice paper. Second year students had the choice of completing a Professional Counselling Research Portfolio or a Thesis, each worth 90 points. At the time there were no formal classes for those enrolled in the thesis programme.

Nationally, all universities and all academic disciplines operate in a neoliberal context. Universities now function in a market economy, with an emphasis on being competitive and economically efficient. According to Harland, Tidswell, Everett, Hale, and Pickering (2010), knowledge within NZ universities “has become a commodity central to the ‘knowledge industry’ with academics and students recast as human capital in a global market place” (p. 87). Section 162 of the Education Act 1989 states that universities are a repository of knowledge and

expertise and accept a role as critic and conscience of society. Harland et al. (2010) are concerned that accountability instruments associated with economic reform impacts on the time academics have available for their teaching and service and the shift towards neoliberal reform “leaves academics with less freedom to act as critic and conscience and may finally threaten the democratic role the university plays in society” (p. 95).

Student numbers at the University of Canterbury fell dramatically after the 2010/2011 Christchurch earthquakes, from pre-quake levels of more than 15,000 in 2010 to around 11,000 in 2015 (Radio New Zealand, 2016). The resulting shortfall in income meant the university went from having a small surplus, to forecasting several years of operating deficit. All Colleges within the university faced difficult decisions when faced with the obvious need to cut costs. Through this challenging time education officials and the National Government worked with the University of Canterbury to ensure that student achievement component funding would continue to be provided at levels that would enable it to keep operating. As a result of strategic activities and staff commitment student numbers have risen annually since 2015 with 12,217 equivalent full-time students enrolled for 2018 (Harris, 2018).

A Social Learning System

Wenger (1998) proposes a social theory of learning that focuses on learning as social participation. In this respect, Wenger states that participation is not limited to engaging in specific activities with certain people, but is more broadly associated with active participation in the practices of social communities and the construction of identities with reference to those

communities. He identifies four interconnected components of a social theory of learning that are necessary to identify social participation as a *system of learning*: meaning, practice, community and identity. In *meaning*, it is to learn through *experience* that our life is meaningful. In *practice* it is to learn by *doing* as we continue mutual engagement in action through shared historical and social resources and frameworks. In *community* it is to learn by belonging, that our participation is recognised as competence. In *identity*, it is to learn through becoming as we create personal histories about how we are changed by being members in our communities.

Wenger's social theory of learning is based on his earlier work with social anthropologist Jean Lave (Lave & Wenger, 1991), on situated learning. *Situated learning* refers to a model of learning that occurs in a particular contextual situation. A trainee or beginning counsellor on a counselling placement is an example of situated learning. Storlie, Baltrinic, Mostade, and Darby (2017) state that because counsellors professional functioning does not peak during their education programmes "research exploring counselor development of professional functioning during experiential courses such as internship is warranted" (p. 225). Given that the focus in New Zealand counselling degree programmes is on skill development within situated learning, there is a need to explore the ways in which social learning systems can impact on counsellor identity development.

Throughout my study as a beginning counsellor I participate in several organisational structures. Communities of Practice (CoP), a concept developed by Wenger (1998) which I elaborate on in the next chapter, emerged in some of these structures which influenced my identity as a

counsellor. I have utilised experiences within the following communities of practice I participated in to create data for this research: as a postgraduate student, a counselling cohort of Master of Counselling students, an internship at a secondary school and employment in two secondary schools.

I chose to use the CoP framework because it reflected my experiences of identity development and therefore could be useful to validate the autoethnographic accounts of practice. Because I often felt powerless in my training, the framework repositioned my powerlessness to the more validating position of newcomer; shifting the emphasis from what I could or could not do, to what conditions for learning various CoP provided. It also allowed me to offer a resistance to the hegemony inherent in the discourses attempting to shape my identity as a counsellor. By examining my identity development within the CoP framework I am able to surface supports and tensions that are subtle yet significant in impact, and are visible only when considering the overall practices of a community instead of focusing solely on the actions of an individual. I use my experiences to ‘story’ data to illustrate my counsellor identity development.

A social learning system is an observable learning system that can be linked to traditions of practice and theory (Blackmore, 2010). In this research I explore how counselling social learning systems influence my identity, by exploring the interplay between historical knowledge shared by the community, and my direct lived experience of being a counsellor. In particular I will examine how the boundaries of communities I participate in affect my identity as a counsellor, and in turn, what practices enable me to transform or develop that identity.

Research Questions

The research questions are:

1. How do counselling social learning systems influence my counsellor identity development?
2. How do reflective and reflexive practices enable me to develop and/or transform my identity as a counsellor?

The following chapters provide the framework to answering these questions. Chapter Two reviews current relevant literature related to key aspects of the research. Chapter Three outlines the methodological framework that underpins the research project in its entirety. Chapters Four and Five provide autoethnographic accounts of my experiences within social learning systems and how they impacted on my identity. These chapters also include the reflective and reflexive methods that developed and/or transformed my identity. Chapter Six provides a summary and draws conclusions from findings of this research. It also outlines implications for practice and possible future research.

Conclusion

Various tertiary institutions in New Zealand are providing counsellor training. With a focus on providing a qualified and experienced workforce, the training involves formal course work as well as situated practice. This autoethnographic research explores the development of identity, first as a trainee counsellor and then as a beginning counsellor within social learning systems in the New Zealand context. It examines how social learning systems within situated practice

influence my counsellor identity development, and how reflective and reflexive practices support or challenge that identity. In the next chapter the literature review outlines relevant literature related to the key concepts in this research: counselling, models of counsellor identity development, Wenger's social theory of learning, supervision and introspective reflective and reflexive practices.

Chapter Two: Relevant Research and Theory

The literature review outlines relevant research and theory related to this research. First, literature related to the profession of counselling and models of counsellor identity development are examined. This is followed by a review of the literature related to social learning systems, and of reflective and reflexive practices. Literature was sourced using the University of Canterbury library collection of books and online databases and journals. In online database searches the following keywords were used: autoethnography, communities of practice, Wenger, counsellor, counselor, counselling, SFT, Solution-focused, identity, identity development, supervision, poetry, journals, meditation, Vipassana, reflective practice, and reflexive practice. I did not place geographical or date restrictions on the searches.

Overview of Counselling

Counselling refers to a relatively brief process “concerned with helping normally functioning or healthy people to achieve their goals or to function more appropriately” (Jones-Smith, 2012, p. 8). According to the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC), “counsellors seek to assist clients to increase their understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, to develop more resourceful ways of living, and to bring about change in their lives” (p. 3).

In New Zealand it can be confusing working out the difference between the terms counsellor, therapy, psychotherapist and psychotherapy. The term counsellor is not a legally protected term in New Zealand so someone calling themselves a counsellor does not need to be a member of the NZAC. The term psychotherapist is legally protected and therefore anyone using the term needs

to be a member of the Psychotherapists Board of Aotearoa New Zealand (abbreviated to PBANZ.) and they are also bound by a scope of practice and a code of ethics. The terms therapy, counselling and psychotherapy are not protected and may be used by any practitioner. The NZAC (2018, FAQ's about counselling, para.4) states that:

There is a lot of similarity between counselling and psychotherapy as they are both 'talking therapies'. Psychotherapy recognises the importance of conscious and unconscious psychological processes and the relationship between the therapist and client to further the healing process. Counselling draws from a number of theoretical approaches and can include these aspects. It will focus on your difficulties and concerns helping you develop more satisfying and resourceful ways of living.

Although the terms counselling and psychotherapy are closely aligned, Jones-Smith (2012) describes psychotherapy as "reconstructive, remedial, in-depth work with individuals who suffer from mental disorders or who evidence serious coping deficiencies" (p. 8). Jones-Smith suggests that the many models of counselling and therapy can be classified into four forces in psychotherapy. The first force covers psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theories including the work of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson. The second force covers behaviour therapy and cognitive approaches to psychotherapy such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The third force includes therapies based on existential and humanistic worldviews such as Person-Centered Therapy and Gestalt Therapy, while the fourth force is based on social constructivism and postmodernism. The fourth force includes Multicultural Psychotherapy, Transcultural Psychotherapy, Feminist Therapy, Gay Therapy and Lesbian Therapy.

While completing the Master of Counselling programme I trained in Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) which Jones-Smith (2012) considered part of the fourth force in psychotherapy. Whilst there is no one person who can claim to have created SFT, Insoo Kim Berg and Steve de Shazer are often viewed as the co-founders of the approach. Berg and de Shazer began the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee where they, and other therapists developed solution-focused theory and techniques (Jones-Smith, 2012). In SFT, therapists and clients become co-collaborators because SFT counsellors reject the notion of being the so called expert with the answers to the client's problems (Bertolino & O'Hanlon, 2002). This repositioning of power in the therapeutic relationship strengthens the position of the client by acknowledging the client's expertise. De Shazer and Dolan (2007, p. 156) remind practitioners that:

Our job is not to think up the right solutions for our clients and convince them to accept them. Our job is to create the conditions under which clients find their own solutions, to help clients look into their hearts to find what they truly want and how they might get there.

The therapeutic relationship

The therapeutic relationship between a counsellor and client is a crucial consideration in counselling. Lambert (1992) showed that relationship variables in the therapeutic alliance may account for 30% of the variance in outcomes for counselling. Founder of person centred therapy, Carl Rogers, (as cited in Jones-Smith, 2012) states that as a therapist, "if I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself or herself the capacity to use that relationship for growth and change, and personal development will occur" (p. 239).

Rogers outlined six conditions he considered necessary to establish a therapeutic relationship. These are psychological contact, incongruent client, therapist congruency, unconditional positive regard, therapist empathy and communication of empathy (Jones-Smith, 2012). *Therapist congruency* is refers to the ability of the counsellor to be genuine and know what he or she is experiencing. This is of particular relevance to this research which explores the use of reflective and reflexive practices to increase my awareness of what I am experiencing and to help me process and understand my lived experiences as a counsellor. The personal qualities of the therapist have been shown to influence the outcomes of therapy nearly three times more than the particular theoretical orientation used (Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, Mintz, & Auerbach, 1988).

Counsellor Identity Development

Developing an identity as a professional within a field can be described as, “positioning oneself in relation to others by differentiating, affiliating, challenging, or accepting certain ways of constructing knowledge, being, and doing in the world” (Achugar, 2009, p. 65). Within the different models of counsellor development there are varying definitions of what counsellor identity development involves. Gibson, Dollarhide, and Moss (2010) state that modern definitions of counsellor professional identity involve three themes: labelling oneself a counsellor, professional integration of skills and attitudes, and recognition of being situated in a professional community. Nugent and Jones (as cited in Prosek and Hurt, 2014) state that counsellor professional identity is defined by the process of how training and personal characteristics are integrated within a professional context. Similarly, Lile (2017) posits that the formation of counsellor identity “includes a process of engaging with values, attitudes, and

actions championed by the profession, and ultimately working to integrate such values, attitudes, and actions with ones larger identity system” (p. 311).

I do not view the concept of identity as uncovering an unchanging sense of self. When I talk of *my identity* in this research, I am referring to myself as a constantly changing entity, interacting with contextual relationships within specific communities. Hall (1996) argues that identities can be fragmented and fractured, are subject to transformation and are formed across multiple sites of “often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (p. 4). As a counsellor trained in SFT I have a social constructionist view that “we construct our reality based on our social interactions with others” (Jones-Smith, 2012, p. 403). I am not interested in exploring someone’s reality based on their personality or being an expert who knows what is best for the client and gives them answers to problems. Rather I support the view of Jones-Smith (2012) view that in SFT “we are always in the process of constructing ourselves, and out of our experiences we form our own realities, which become our stories” (p. 404).

Lerner, as cited in Rønnestad and Skovholt (1995), argues that irrespective of the philosophical or theoretical basis, all models of development have three similar characteristics. These are: “that development implies change of some sort; the change is organized systematically; and the change involves succession over time” (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 1995, p. 3).

One model of therapist and counsellor development involves the developmental paradigm where counsellors move through a succession of stages throughout their professional lifespans.

Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987) suggest a staged developmental approach, involving four stages. In this model trainees develop their self and other awareness, motivation and autonomy

progressive throughout the stages, reaching the fourth stage where they become what they refer to as an integrated counsellor. Similarly, Hill, Charles, and Reed (1981), in their study of doctoral training in counselling psychology, suggest a four stage model of development. Their first stage they identify is *sympathy* where the counsellor is providing positive support to the client. The second stage, *counsellor stance* involves the counsellor trying to master a particular therapeutic model. The third stage, *transition*, is where a counsellor realises the limitations of the chosen model and the fourth stage, *integrated personal style* involves the integration of modalities and techniques into a personal style of counselling.

Rønnestad and Skovholt (1995) also suggested a staged approach to development, and stated that counsellors progressed through eight stages of development. In 2003 they revisited their initial research stating that, “the process of obtaining a better, deeper, more nuanced understanding of the material is an ongoing and, within the limits of our professional lives and mental capacities, infinite process” (p. 9). As a consequence they collapsed the eight stages into six phases, as outlined in the table below.

Table One: Rønnestad and Skovholt Phases of Counsellor Development (2003)

Name of Phase	Description
The lay helper	Untrained and using natural skills. Quick to identify a problem and offer support.
The beginning student	Students are vulnerable and dependent. They search for viable models.
The advanced student	An intern on placement, with a supervisor.
The novice professional	This phase covers the first few years after graduation and is characterised by sequentially ordered change;

	seeking to confirm the validity of training, disillusionment with professional training, and then exploration of self and professional environment
The experienced professional	The integration and consolidation of the personal self with professional practice.
The senior professional	Typically has practiced for 20-25 years or more and is recognised by others as being a senior professional. A guide for novices, and a high level of work satisfaction.

A narrative model of counsellor identity development involves the construction of stories about the self. Winslade (2002) states that student counsellors develop their identities through a set of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes which enable them to construct stories about who they are as counsellors. He suggests that the focus of counsellor education is one of “co-authoring (students and counsellor educators together) a story of professional identity development” (p. 35). Zeligman (2017) uses storying as part of a developmental narrative model (DNM) to increase trainee counsellor competence. Gordon and Luke (2012) investigated the professional identity development of school counsellors through supervision and found that “constructed dialogue” from supervisees was one of the strategies they used to demonstrate their competence.

One method of counsellor identity development is referred to as the critical incident approach (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Furr and Carroll (2003) asked 84 trainee counsellors at masters level to identify critical incidents that occurred while they were training, that were influential in their professional development. Interestingly, the study found that the most cited critical events were

those that occurred outside of the counselling programme, not from within the planned counsellor programme.

Although there has been wide-ranging research on counsellor identity development, there is a lack of extant autoethnographic research into counsellor identity development¹. Wittig (2013) produced an illustrated autoethnography of counsellor identity development, outlining experiences that stood out for her while completing her counsellor training. In my research I use autoethnography to illustrate the ongoing development of counsellor identity within training, placement, internship and employment. In Chapter Three I outline my reasons for choosing an autoethnographic approach for this research.

A Social Theory of Learning

Lave and Wenger's (1991) research on situated learning created a paradigm shift when they positioned active social participation as the primary vehicle for learning instead of the traditional notion of learning where an individual acquires knowledge from an expert (Hughes, Jewson, & Unwin, 2007). Lave and Wenger developed the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (also abbreviated to LPP), a characteristic process of learning that occurs within situated practice. The learning process evolves within a framework of participation; as newcomers engage with current members within a CoP and progressively move towards full participation.

¹ I was only able to locate one autoethnographic research paper about counsellor identity development

Communities of practice

Practitioners of the CoP model argue that social practice is how we fundamentally learn and develop as people. Wenger (1998) posits that as social beings, we interact with each other and engage in common pursuits, which produce learning, either intentionally or unintentionally. Over time “this collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the attendant social relations” (Wenger, 1998, p. 45). He suggests that because of this the practices belong to a kind of community and these can be referred to as *communities of practice* (CoP): rather than being formal organisational structures CoP emerge from the practices of participants.

Three core concepts define whether a community is a CoP or not. The three concepts that denote a CoP are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire. *Mutual engagement* involves connecting meaningfully to what we are able to do, as well acknowledging what we are not able to do, and therefore being able to engage with the knowledge and experiences of others. *Joint enterprise* is the day to day reality produced by the participants in response to their conditions and constraints, within a framework of mutual accountability. A *shared repertoire* refers to a community’s shared resources that reflect a history of mutual engagement and are able to be used to negotiate meaning. On this basis therefore although the proximity of participants in a suburban neighbourhood might identify it as a *community*, it is not necessarily a *community of practice*.

Identity

Participation within a CoP is not just defined as engaging in activities with other people. It is about the broader experience of being “active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities” (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). Snyder and Wenger (2010) posit that ‘the most distinctive, valuable knowledge in organisations is difficult or impossible to codify and is tightly associated with a professional’s personal identity’ (p. 110). Wenger (1998) states that “building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities” (p. 145). He describes identity as a process of mutual constitution between the individual and the collective. As such, as Winslade (2002) notes developing an identity as counsellor involves developing an identity through relationship. A professional identity as a counsellor is to be what Winslade describes as ‘consistent with the performance of the values and skills of counseling practice’ (2002, p. 35)². The need to situate identity development within specific practice is also expounded by Hall (1996) who states “precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies” (p. 4).

Boundary

The concept of boundary is an important aspect of the CoP theory. Wenger (2004) states that as participants in CoP develop shared histories of learning, boundaries form, differentiating participants from non-participants. There may be markers denoting the boundary of a CoP.

² Throughout this work the terms ‘counsellor’ and ‘counselling’ are written using the British English spelling. Exceptions are quotations where the author has used the American English spelling of ‘counselor’ and ‘counseling’.

Within counselling CoP these markers may include the use of terminology, titles, membership of professional bodies, qualifications and assessment practices. CoP do not exist in isolation and are influenced by practices and social influences in broader contexts as well as the practices of other CoP. Boundaries are particularly noticeable when participants of one CoP transition to another and attempt to negotiate meaning.

When a trainee/beginning counsellor attends a counselling placement they begin their training on the boundary of the CoP. At that space they are not yet full members of the community but they are recognised by other CoP participants as having an inbound trajectory towards full membership. There is limited research available about the experiences of participants moving from the boundary of a CoP towards the centre. Woodside, Ziegler, and Paulus (2009) used a CoP framework to explore the internship experiences of graduate students completing a masters degree in school counselling. They found that CoP “proved to be a salient theoretical framework for understanding the school counselling internship experience” (p. 33).

A critique of the CoP theory by Hughes, Jewson and Unwin (2007) states that the issue of the ways identities and meanings are shaped by wider social memberships is not significantly addressed in the theory. They take issue with Wenger’s (1998) use of the terms individuals, persons and the collective when discussing identity in practice. Hughes, Jewson, and Unwin (2007) state that Wenger “does not discuss men and women, old and young, black and white, rich and poor. It is as if members of communities of practice are standard interchangeable units rather than human beings rooted in specific biographies” (p. 172). This issue is particularly

relevant to the practice of counselling which focuses on unique individual narratives, that are created and experienced within frameworks of family, work, and societal systems. Counsellors need to not only assist with the presenting issue, but also appreciate the cultural contextual complexity of the client's story.

James (2007) also refers to the three concepts of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire as harmonizing categories that “ignore the dynamic processes involved in the formation and reproduction of communities of practice” (p. 132). James states that Lave and Wenger (1991) acknowledge issues of power and control, but considers they do not address the importance of the broader institutional contexts in the operation of CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991) did state that “any attempt to analyze a form of learning through legitimate peripheral participation must involve analysis of the political and social organization of that form, its historical development, and the effects of both of these on sustained possibilities for learning” (p. 64). In relation to the concept of a CoP, they also acknowledged that “unequal relations of power must be included more systematically in our analysis” (p. 42). These points are particularly relevant to my experience and identity development and speak directly to my use of autoethnography as a research methodology, because it enables my solitary story of what I experienced within political and social structures to be heard.

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

Becoming reflective and reflexive in practice are key developmental concepts within counsellor education. Reflexive practices refers to “social practices are constantly examined and reformed

in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens, 1990, p. 3). Reflective practices can be viewed as the bedrock of professional identity development and involve gaining new insights into one’s self and/or practice by reflecting on experiences (Finlay, 2008). Etherington (2004) states that reflexivity is a skill that counsellors develop: “an ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events, and to use that knowledge to inform our actions, communications and understanding” (p. 19). With varying definitions and overlap, it can be difficult to decipher exact terminology within the literature as to what constitutes reflective or reflexive practices (Dallos & Stedman, 2009). Although this research is related to the development of counsellor identity, there are various definitions of what constitutes reflective and reflexive practices across different helping professions which relate to counselling.

In Schon’s (1983) seminal work, *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, he identifies two separate reflective processes: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. *Reflection-in-action* involves awareness, analysis and adjustment of practice *as it occurs*. *Reflection-on-action* is a process whereby the practitioner critically examines his/her *past* practice with a view to improving future practice. Since professional practice is complex and unpredictable, for both types of reflection, practitioners attempt to identify their feelings, and theoretical positions. By using both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, practitioners arrive at new understandings, and this in turn shapes their subsequent actions. Finlay (2008) states that Schon’s 1983 work has been hugely influential across professional training and education as it has inspired many models and categories of reflective practice.

The concept of reflective practice was developed further by Dallos and Stedmon (2009), who state that reflective practice involves “a successive process of analyzing and reanalyzing important episodes of activity, drawing on multiple levels of representation” (p. 4). They describe two processes that contribute to reflective practice: personal reflection and personal reflexivity. *Personal reflection* involves therapist awareness of what is happening in the moment during a therapy session with regards to personal feelings, sensation, memories and thoughts that are being triggered. In defining *personal reflexivity* Dallos and Stedmon draw on the work of Chinn (2007) who uses the term *personal reflexivity* to describe a largely cognitive process where the therapist retrospectively processes events using knowledge and theory, to become aware of how her own history and positioning contribute to the therapeutic process. However, Dallos and Stedmon believe that reflexivity can also be, “a creative, artistic and playful activity that utilizes a person’s selfhood and agency beyond the narrower confines of their acquired academic knowledge” (p. 5). It is from this definition that I take supports for the use of poetry, meditation and social engagement as reflexive practices.

Cornish (2011) argues that “negative capability” is an important reflective tool. Although she is referring to the use of negative capability as a reflective practice for social workers, it is an important concept for counsellors as well. Cornish states that there are three aspects to the concept. The first is for the therapist to have an imaginative openness of mind, which generates empathy and creativity for the client, and enables the therapist to observe what is happening for the client. The second is the ability to be receptive to the diversity of reality and therefore the diversity of client experience. The third is negation of the ego which she describes as the

“holding back from a premature understanding and interpretation of what we experience, which necessitates the suspension of the active intellect which seeks to categorize and therefore limit what it finds” (p. 143).

Rosin (2015) argues that definitions of reflective practice are not inclusive of self reflection, and that “critical self reflection is crucial for increasing self-awareness and improving counseling practice” (p. 88). She draws on the work of Wong-Wylie (2010), who built on Schon’s (1983) two reflective processes by adding a third process: *reflection-on-self-in/on-action*, which connects self-awareness with reflective practice. Wong-Wylie’s (2010) new reflective process highlighted the way that personal experiences influence both personal and professional practices. Rosin (2015) posits that in that order for a counsellor to become critically self-reflective the counsellor needs to have developed the necessary characteristics of critical self-reflection (Merriam, 2004), the capacity for reflective distance (Voegelin, 1999) and heightened emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Rosin also believed that in terms of personality development, a counsellor needed to have progressed through the individuation process to the second half of life (Hollis, 2005).

As a beginning counsellor I found it confusing trying to relate the different theoretical frameworks of what defined reflective and reflexive practice, to what I actually did in practice. Irving and Williams (2007) also note this, and argue that although counsellors may be able to articulate their beliefs about their theories of practice, this differs from their implicit *theories-in-use*. What they do is different from what they say they do.

Supervision

Engagement in professional supervision is a cornerstone reflective practice for counsellors in New Zealand. According to the supervision policy of the NZAC, the largest professional membership body of counsellors in New Zealand, all practicing counsellors are required have supervision. The NZAC Code of Ethics states that professional supervision refers to a contractual alliance between a counsellor and supervisor in order “for counsellors to reflect on and develop effective and ethical practice” (NZAC, 2016, p. 11). Supervision includes personal support, as well as mentoring counsellors in their development of a professional identity development and reflection on their relationships, work and cultural perspectives (NZAC, 2015).

There is variance in the goals and practices of supervision. According to Bordin (1983) the relationship between supervisor and supervisee forms a supervisory working alliance that has three components: agreed goals for supervision, a shared emotional connection between the supervisor and supervisee, and a shared understanding of the tasks needed to achieve supervision goals. Chopra (2013) argues that all supervision is multicultural with the need for supervisors to be culturally sensitive and not only help their supervisee with multicultural issues in practice but also to train the supervisee in multicultural competencies. Degges-White, Colon, and Borzumato-Gainey (2013) state that in feminist supervision the goals include “sharing responsibility for the supervision process, empowering the supervisee, attending to the contextual assumptions about clients, and analysing gender roles” (p. 92).

Harries and Spong (2017) found that in the school context counsellors have specific supervision requirements due to their roles as part of a wider system. Their research identified five categories that are significant in the supervision practices of school counsellors. The first category was for supervisors to have an understanding of both *content and context* because this was “fundamental to supervision of counsellors, and both relate to the notion of the counsellor being embedded in the school as a system” (p. 152). The second category involved the *separation of roles* with participants identifying that a supervisor would ideally be independent of the organisation to allow for separation of roles, yet still needed to have knowledge of how the dynamics of a secondary school system may impact on the supervisory needs of a counsellor. The third category was *boundaries and confidentiality*, with a need for supervisors to help their supervisees manage the boundaries around confidentiality which at times in a school setting can become blurred. The fourth category was around *goals of the environment* and understanding the tensions that occur between the needs of the school and the needs of the clients, because the school has an educational focus and counselling has a therapeutic one. The last category was *managing risk*, the need for school counsellors to explore with their supervisor the school structures for risk and the impact these have on their work.

Just as there are differences in the goals of supervision, there is also variance in the practices. Although counselling supervision commonly takes place face to face, Gordon and Luke (2012) investigated the use of email as a supervision tool between supervisees and their supervisor. Graham, Scholl, Smith-Adcock, and Wittmann (2014) argue that there is no such thing as a standard practice of supervision that will suit all counsellors. They state that in addition to

conventional supervision practices there is a need for creative approaches to supervision using applications such as bibliosupervision (the use of fictional children's literature), psychodrama (the use of enactment) and sandtray work (using methods with a tray of sand to connect to the unconscious).

Introspective Reflective and Reflexive Practices

Poetry

Reading poetry is a valid method of therapeutic self-reflection and examination (Ingram & Nakazawa, 2003; McNichols & Witt, 2018; Freeman, 1999). Ingram and Nakazawa (2003), studied the reflective process of counsellors reading sociocultural poems³ for professional development. The process was designed to build cultural competence, assist with understanding a client's lived experience, and to help create empathy. They found that the use of sociocultural poems created reflective practice that enabled "a framework of respect, understanding and exploration" for the counsellors (p. 491).

Drawing on Freudian and Kleinian psychoanalytic theories Akhtar (2000) argues that poetry is a "cultural ointment against mental pain" by activating psychological defence mechanisms used to control and minimise mental pain, and uses terms from that tradition to describe these mechanisms (p. 229). The first mechanism is *psychic retreat*, when a person temporarily withdraws their attention from the troubling situation, whilst endeavouring to read or write poetry. The second mechanism involves *manic defence*, in which the passive nature of suffering

³ Ingram and Moule (as cited in Ingram & Nakazawa, 2003) define sociocultural poetry as 'writings that address the social, cultural, and racial lived experiences of members of oppressed groups' (p. 486).

is replaced with the creative action of reading or writing poetry. The third mechanism, *change of function*, involves using poetry as a means of changing the form or function of one's suffering into an object of mastery. The last defence mechanism, *extrusion of pain and induction into others*, is enabled by sharing private pain with an imagined audience, to create empathic resonance. In this research I use the mechanisms of manic defense and change of function as part of my reflective practice of reading poetry.

Meditation

In this research I use the term meditation to refer specifically to the technique of Vipassana meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, because that is the form of meditation that I practice. There are other schools of Vipassana but their practices are not outlined in this research, because they are not pertinent to the argument. Fleischman (1995) states that “the meaning of the word *Vipassana* is insight, to see things as they really are” (p. 4). Hart (2004) defines the practice further by stating that Vipassana means “introspection, insight that totally purifies the mind. Specifically, insight into the impermanent nature of mind and body” (p. 164). According to Goenka (as cited in Hart, 2004), “it is natural for a pure mind to remain detached, full of love, compassion, joy, equanimity” (p. 41).

Vipassana as a non sectarian, universal technique that can be practiced by anyone, irrespective of religion. It is experiential and does not involve visualisation and verbalisation. Practitioners of Vipassana meditation (as taught by S.N. Goenka) first learn the technique by attending a 10 day residential course with a qualified teacher. There is no charge for the teaching, although students

who have completed a course are able to make a donation if they wish. The traditional practice of Vipassana has been adapted and sometimes distorted by shortening, medicalisation and commercialisation particularly as it has spread throughout the world in techniques of mindfulness (Fleischman, 2010). Although there is a significant amount of literature related to mindfulness, (which some Western scholars may consider to be meditation), this is not the practice of Vipassana meditation described in this research.

Research studies exploring psychological wellbeing and subjective stress have highlighted benefits for participants who attended a standard Vipassana course ⁴. Szekeres and Wertheim (2015) studied participants, using self-report measures, before and after completing a 10 day Vipassana course, and found “positive, medium to large size effects of a 10-day Vipassana course on stress, well-being, self-kindness and mindfulness when assessed at least two weeks after course completion” (p. 380). Another study compared the usual treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with participants who had PTSD and who completed a Vipassana course (Simpson et al., 2007). Researchers found there were no significant differences in the severity of symptoms between Vipassana meditators and the control group: however, those who had meditated showed a significant reduction in substance use compared to treatment as usual, regardless of the severity of PTSD symptoms.

Walsh, Victor and Bitner (2006) state that there is considerable evidence to support claims that meditation practice significantly enhances perceptual capacities. They found that “perceptual

⁴ A standard course is a residential 10 day course and begins on the evening of the first day and concludes on the morning of the last day.

sensitivity, discrimination, processing speed, and empathy all appear to be enhanced, as measured by, for example, reaction time, evoked potential” (p. 134). Research has found that after sitting a course, a group of Vipassana meditators showed reduced problems related to alcohol, and reduced psychiatric symptoms (Bowen et al., 2006) and significant increases in acceptance rather than suppression of thoughts (Bowen et al, 2007). In both studies the results were still significant at the ten month follow-up. Chiesa (2010) noted that the studies by Bowen et al. (2006), Bowen et al. (2007) and Simpson et al. (2007) all used incarcerated participants. Chiesa states that this fact limits the ability to generalise their findings to the general population of substance or alcohol abusers. Qazinezam, Momtazi, and Yaghubu (2014) found that training in the technique of Vipassana meditation increased the psychological wellbeing of study participants. The effect was significant and still evident at a three month follow up.

In this thesis I explore how the use of Vipassana meditation contributes to my counsellor identity development. Using autoethnographic writing I am able to explore psychological shifts that occur through my use of the technique and how these shifts influence my counsellor identity development.

Engaging with reflective processes should not be viewed as an overly individualistic and internal process, (Dallos & Stedmon, 2009) and indeed, I have experienced many valuable reflective moments that have emerged from social interactions. Dallos and Stedmon (2009) state that “perhaps the greatest prompt to reflections lies in social engagement through conversations,

readings, movies, watching television and so, on, when we are exposed to the thoughts of others” (p. 17).

In this chapter I have examined the literature related to counselling (and models of counsellor identity development), as well as literature related to social learning systems, and introspective reflective and reflexive practices. In the next chapter I provide a rationale for using the methodological approach of autoethnography that links with the literature relating to reflective and reflexive practices. I also describe both the methodology and methods as they relate to the research questions.

Chapter Three: Epistemology and Methodology

This chapter outlines the epistemology and methodology used in this research. Epistemology refers to the construction of truth, about what we accept to be true and how we know that (Grbich, 2007). Methodology refers to the underpinning theoretical framework and procedures of research, and methods are the techniques used in data collection (Biklen & Bogdan, (2007). I will provide an overview of social constructionism and provide a warrant for the qualitative methodological approach of autoethnography. I will then discuss the methods (personal documentation and autoethnography) and types of data (poetry, personal documentation and mediation) used in this research. The chapter concludes with an outline of ethical considerations related to this thesis.

Epistemology and Theoretical Framework

When I first designed the research questions I began to examine what shaped my views about identity and learning. My personal understanding about how I view the world is largely influenced by my lived experience of meditation. Each day as I sit (in meditation) I experience the world within my mind. This process is supported by Cozolino's (2010) statement that within our neural networks we encode every memory, behaviour and experience. I experience all my thoughts, my experiences, my cravings, and my feelings within the framework of my body as the rising and passing away of sensation. I can feel my mental reactions to environmental stimuli and see how my mind reacts with craving or aversion. My mental reactions to social environments shape my view of myself, and this in turn influences the social environments I participate in. Cozolino (2010) examined the neuroscience of psychotherapy and found the mirror neurons in

ourselves may activate networks of emotion in the people we interact with so that “our own internal state-generated via mirroring - can become our intuitive ‘theory’ of the internal state of the other” (p. 186). As such, I am shaped by being part of a social environment, and in turn, I shape the environment.

Social constructionism is a worldview that posits that knowledge arises socially through interpretations and shared experience. I perceive my identity as emerging from my social environment and because of this social constructionism is the epistemological stance that supports this research. It arises from the constructivist ontological position that knowledge is subjectively constructed (Gaudet & Robert, 2018). Grbich (2007) states that within a constructivist position “reality is viewed as socially and societally embedded and existing within the mind” (p. 8). As reality arises in the mind, multiple realities are inferred for any situation as people may experience the same event differently (Grbich, 2007).

Social constructionism research grew from the influence of postmodernism which is an ideological position which rejects the notion of grand or metanarratives, instead favouring “mini narratives” that search for meaning (Grbich, 2007, p. 10). There are several core beliefs of postmodernism : that reality is both a social and cultural construction, that all things are impermanent, that there is the capacity to dialogue with multiple contexts throughout time and space and that all forms of constructed borders are able to be permeated and reconstructed (Grbich, 2013). These beliefs support my use of poetry and meditation as introspective practices to reflexively examine my identity development in relation to social learning systems.

Qualitative Approach

McLeod (2011) describes qualitative research as “a process of systematic inquiry into the meanings which people employ to make sense of their experience and guide their actions” (p. 73). He points out that whereas quantitative researchers use measurement or statistical techniques to measure variables, the qualitative researcher is interested in meaning, and aims to describe understandings. I wanted to create research that I could use to understand my emerging counsellor identity development and for this reason a qualitative approach to research was appropriate. There is no single accepted way of doing qualitative research (Snape & Spencer, 2003). I chose autoethnography as a research approach because it seeks to “describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). As a consequence autoethnography would provide a broad platform from which I could explore my ongoing identity development as a counsellor.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a social constructionist research practice that enables the researcher to embed themselves within theory and practice to show their process of knowledge construction (McIlveen, 2008). It is a style of research and writing that links autobiographical experiences to social, cultural and political theories (Ellis, 2004). Etherington (2004) notes that with “the challenges brought about by feminist and new paradigm research methodologies, the use of ‘self’ has become more and more legitimate in research” (p. 20). Autoethnography is a relatively new methodology and in 2009 Wright queried whether “in counseling and psychotherapy, it is not yet accepted to claim that personal narrative or auto ethnographic inquiry ‘counts’ as research - or is

it?” (p. 628). Chang (2016) states that over recent years autoethnography has become more “popular and publishable as a legitimate form of research in health science” (p. 443). It is an emergent methodology useful in accessing knowledge and data to answer research questions that might not be adequately addressed using traditional research approaches (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Adams, Ellis, and Jones (2017) state that “autoethnographers speak against, or provide alternatives to, dominant, taken for granted, and harmful cultural scripts, stories and stereotypes” (p. 3). As such autoethnography is a useful methodology for this research because I want to speak about my experiences as a beginning counsellor to highlight practices outside the main discourse on counsellor identity development. I am able to provide what Geertz (1973) terms a “thick description” of my personal experiences as a basis for the research and this enables me to use my experiences to surface knowledge that is not part of the dominant discourse.

In autoethnography the visibility of the researcher is critical and celebrated (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013), but this visibility is not without risk. Writing a piece of autoethnography is an exercise in vulnerability (Ellis, 2004; Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013; Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). I have intentionally revealed my inner experiences so that others may witness cultural perspectives inherent in counsellor identity development. In doing so there is risk and Jones, Adams, and Ellis caution that “telling personal stories in/as research always carries personal, relational and ethical risks” (2013, p. 19). This may be particularly relevant in this research where I am examining my identity development as a counsellor. Etherington (2017) argues that personal experience is important in counselling and psychotherapy research as “personal experience is at the heart of what we do in counselling and psychotherapy” (p. 87).

Reflexivity is a core component of both counselling practice and autoethnography. McLeod (2003) states that reflexivity is one of the characteristics of most qualitative counselling research; “the idea that the researcher is his or her primary instrument, and as a result must be aware of the fantasies, expectations and needs that his or her participation introduces to the research process” (p. 72). Simon du Plock in Bager-Charleson (2010) states that “therapists who take reflexivity seriously are ideally positioned to generate forms of research grounded in first-person experience and naive inquiry” (p. 137). Similarly, Grbich (2013) asserts that in postmodern research “reflexive subjectivity and the politics of position replace objectivity” (p. 113). Researchers are reflexive by positioning themselves within the process in order to reduce the unintended effects of power and highlight how biography and interpretation influence the construction of knowledge (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008).

Writing autoethnographically requires that I observe myself, interrogate what I think and believe, and challenge my assumptions (Ellis, 2013). This approach is supported by Smith (2012) who states that the critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity. I began by writing my personal experiences, and then opening these up to possible cultural interpretations through the lens of Wenger’s social learning theory, which surfaced insights into wider practices that affected on my identity development. I then used reflective and reflexive practices which developed and/or transformed my thinking, beliefs and assumptions about my counsellor identity within social learning systems.

Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) state that there are features which differentiate autoethnographic research from other personal work. They state that although personal experience anchors the research, it is not an opportunity to become self-absorbed in one's biographical story. The first characteristic common with all autoethnographic research is that it intentionally uses personal experience to highlight cultural perspectives. The use of my solitary story as autoethnographic research is not to highlight my experience per se, but to show how my experience is shaped by inequities in social learning systems. Weaver-Hightower's (2011) autoethnographic account of his daughter's stillbirth is an example of how one's story can link to cultural perspectives as he revealed how his grief was "susceptible to gender restrictions and other social and cultural inequities" (p. 479).

When I reflect on some of my thoughts, feelings and actions now, I view them very differently from when I was experiencing them. Anderson and Glass-Coffin (2013) remind me that "social life, identities and relationships are fluid, not static" (p. 78). As an example there is truth in the maxim "a thesis is never finished, only submitted". I have deliberately chosen to describe experiences as I initially felt them, not as I subsequently came to understand them, so that the document reflects some of the fluidity involved in discussing growth in identity development in relation to situated social learning systems. This approach is in line with Bochner and Ellis's (2006) view that "autoethnographies show people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and what their struggles mean" (p. 111).

Initially I chose to include experiences for a variety of reasons including: those that highlighted injustice, ones that did not sit easily with me, ones that I needed assistance from others to process, and those that would not disappear after daily meditation practice. There were, however, some experiences that affectedly me strongly that could not be included. Because the research is intended to be engaging as a literary work I wanted to craft my experiences into evocative stories, but not every experience lent itself to the depth required for autoethnographic research. This echoes Ellis's (2004) advice that "one has to find the story in the experience, and not every experience is a story" (p. 107). Some experiences I considered important to my identity development were omitted because they lay outside of the boundaries of the research questions. Eventually I followed the example of autoethnographer, Carolyn Ellis (2004), "I tend to write about experiences that knock me for a loop and challenge the construction of meaning" (p. 33). As such I chose experiences that met three criteria: the experience impacted significantly on my identity development, it illustrated the functioning of social learning systems, and the use of reflective or reflexive practices developed and/or transformed my identity within the social learning system.

Autoethnography was also my chosen methodology because there is limited research of master's level student counsellors' experiences of identity development (Auxier et al., 2003). I want to express my direct lived experience of developing an identity as a counsellor and could not find a way to capture my experience using counsellor identity development frameworks developed by other voices. Denzin (2014) argues that "autoethnographic work must always be interventionist, seeking to give notice to those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story or who are

denied a voice to speak” (p. 6). As a methodology it is broad enough to enable me to story my experience of how various counselling social learning systems influence my counsellor identity development, and how introspective reflective and reflexive practices develop and/or transform my identity within those systems.

Methods

Personal documentation

The use of personal documentation is a valuable source of data for autoethnographers (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013). This research draws data from two different types of personal documentation: my learning journals and my diary. Using a journal as a tool for reflexive research has been well documented (Lang, 2012). In counselling training the keeping of a journal as part of personal development is a long-standing tradition (Daniels & Feltham, 2004). Bolton (2010) states that the insight obtained by a learning journal could not be facilitated by discussion with a colleague or mentor, and that “learning journals are cornerstones of reflective practice and critical reflexivity” (p. 129). Storlie, Baltrinic, Mostade, and Darby (2017) state that reflective journals “encourage reflective practice and self-appraisal, and help students communicate with educators and document personal development” (p. 227). In my learning journal I recorded data related to my developing professional practice as a counsellor. The second type of documentation was my diary that I wrote in on occasions when I wanted to focus more on frustrations and tensions within relationships. At times there were overlaps between the journal and diary and there would be entries recorded in both about the same situation, as

developing an identity as a counsellor meant I sometimes needed to address issues with relationships

My learning journal was a space for recording data and in it I recorded supervision notes and my psychological reactions and adaptations I made to my practice. Thompson (2004) states that “a where I was not comfortable with some aspect of my practice, or reinforced growing confidence or ability in counselling practice and allowed me to explore struggles with my identity development as a counsellor. In my diary I recorded my thoughts and feelings about events and relationships. It also contains examples of personal poems, inspirations poems and quotes, and insights gained through meditation practice. Using journal and diary entries I was able to construct autoethnographic accounts of practice that occurred within each CoP.

Autoethnographic considerations

In autoethnography the narrative brings to the surface the theory and makes it more obvious, because, as Bochner states (in Ellis, 2004, p. 23), “there’s nothing more theoretical than a good story”. Because the narrative is complex and multifaceted, with multiple patterns of cultural experience needing to be addressed, methodological descriptions are woven into the narrative. There can be pressure on autoethnographers to analyse their work using social sciences publishing conventions (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ellis and Bochner (2006) state that there is a fundamental difference between stories and traditional analysis, namely the way the story is explained and how it affects the reader. They state that “traditional analysis is about transferring information, whereas narrative inquiry emphasises communication” (p. 438).

According to Chang (2013) autoethnography meaning-making begins with reviewing the data holistically. I began with reading the entire text to identify ways in which I had answered the research questions. Reading my research this way is supported by the approach taken by Corbin and Strauss (2008) who state that in qualitative research “the analytic process, like any thinking process, should be relaxed, flexible, and driven by insight gained through interaction with data rather than being overly structured and based only on procedures” (p. 12). The data I surfaced is summarised in the conclusion chapter.

Data

A variety of data sources have been used in this research. Lang (2012) asks how researchers can navigate the liminal space between themselves and those included in the research. I have chosen data sources that enabled me to explore the liminal spaces around practice and perception, which therefore allow new understandings to emerge. Initially I used personal memory to generate the experiences I thought may be useful data for this research. I then used personal documentation, poetry reading, and meditation practice and insights as data sources.

Personal memories

The use of personal memory is a cornerstone practice in autoethnography (Chang, 2016). Recalling events and my emotional reactions within those experiences helped me brainstorm the initial experiences that I thought may be relevant for this research. Narratives written to reflect those experiences were used as the starting point for the research. Bolton (2010) supports the use of story as reflective practice yet reminds us that “we will never arrive at a ‘true’ account, one

which enables us to see what people ‘really’ thought and felt in any situation, or ‘what really happened’ ” (p. 2). This is supported by the view that in autoethnography the goal is to “extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (Bochner, 2000, p. 270). I critically examined the narratives through later re-reading by myself, and then by my external counseling supervisor, before using reflective and reflexive practices to allow different readings to emerge.

Personal documentation

My learning journal was a space for recording data and in it I recorded supervision notes and my psychological reactions and adaptations I made to my practice. Thompson (2004) states that “a journal is a journey, a way of finding a voice” (p. 73). This is the way in which I used my journal writing because it predominantly highlighted areas where I was not comfortable with some aspect of my practice, or reinforced growing confidence or ability in counselling practice and allowed me to explore struggles with my identity development as a counsellor. The learning journal also enabled me to see how my perspective on an event changed with time. Writing in it enabled me to establish relationships not only with others, but also with the self, a point that Thompson (2004) makes. In my diary I recorded my thoughts and feelings about events and relationships. It also contains examples of personal poems, inspirations poems and quotes, and insights gained through meditation practice.

Reading poetry

Receiving the wisdom of others by reading their poetry has been one of my most treasured reflective experiences. In selecting a poem to use as reflective tool in this research I have chosen ones that I was reading at the time each experience was occurring and is recorded in the same format used in the source of publication in the reference list. I was able to use my diaries to identify each poem, because the poems and my reflections on them were recorded in my diaries at the time of the experience. This potentially highlights what Grbich (2013) sees as one of the weaknesses of poetic inquiry: “the potential of the researcher colonizing the data through re-presentation of selective perspectives to suit their own beliefs and values or to create desired outcomes” (p. 130). I believe, however, this risk is inherent in any qualitative research. There are conscious and unconscious determinants in all research about what is observed, measured and recorded. Grbich (2013) states that one of the significant changes in qualitative research due to postmodern influences is the position of the reader. Instead of being a passive reader of the text that accepts the researcher’s authority, the reader is assumed to have a more active role and will use the text as one of multiple sources that enable them to form a response to the information. Grbich continues and states that each reader will take something different away from the research allowing for ongoing interpretations and deconstructions.

Meditation

I sat my first meditation course in 1997 at Dhamma Aloka, a Vipassana meditation centre on the outskirts of Melbourne, Australia. Since then most years I have managed to complete a course and maintain daily practice at home. When I refer to meditation practice in this research I use the

expression of sitting to describe the daily practice of sitting on a stool, cushion or chair to meditate. I sit either in the morning, or evening, or both. I have described meditation as a reflexive practice yet is not something I do as part of this research; it is a part of my life and naturally affects the way I live. I never tried to use the technique to get any understanding or insight about my experiences. I just sat as part of my daily practice. Any subsequent changes in understanding, behaviour and relationships over time were surfaced through analysis of learning journal and diary entries.

Ethical Considerations

Autoethnography is an emergent field and institutional practices around procedural ethics may not cover ethics in practice. A formal ethics application was not deemed necessary and this has created challenges given that data generated could not be used. According to Mutch (2005) “it is important to act ethically to protect the researched, the researcher, and the credibility of the research” (p. 88). Although it is not possible to design ethically neutral research (McLeod, 2011), it is possible to design a framework that takes into account the ethical and moral implications of the study. As a researcher I need to not only protect the participant (myself) and those included in my narrative, but also need to consider the impact on future autoethnographers if I use a relatively new, emergent methodology, without due care.

I was acutely aware through conversations with supervisors and counselling colleagues that there was risk involved in identifying some of the practices occurring within CoP. In order to minimise risk I needed to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages for including a CoP in the research.

Biklen and Bogdan (2007) caution that “while you can never be sure of how your findings will be received and used, the political ramifications and implications of your work must be carefully thought through” (p. 53). They reminded me that the primary goal of researchers “is to add knowledge, not to pass judgment on a setting” (p. 34). As such, there were some defining experiences that would have made evocative reading that I did not include. The reason for the omission is that I could not do justice to the narratives without providing sufficient details, which could enable easy identification of the people involved in the CoP, and this may cause at the very least, embarrassment for those involved. I am writing this autoethnography in the university department where some of the experiences occurred and this has had an impact on the thesis supervisory arrangements, with an initial supervisor withdrawing from my supervision team.

There are ethical considerations that I needed to address. First, I am the only participant in the study, although I am not the only person involved or implicated in some of the experiences described. Second, I had to acknowledge that being an insider within the CoP does not entitle me to claim expertise. I also needed to consider that while there has was no intention or attempt at the time of the experience to formally gather data through observation and participation, I am reflecting on experiences which are perceived through lenses no-one else involved in the experience was aware of at the time. I needed to recognise that even though I may have shared an event with others, we may tell very different stories about what had happened (Tullis Owen, McRae, Adams, & Vitale, 2009). In addition individuals may have acted in ways, or shared views that they no longer support, or wish to be shared.

There are differing views on how ethical considerations should be addressed in autoethnography. Chang (2016) argues that autoethnography needs to follow an ethical framework in order to protect both the rights of the researcher, as well as those who are presented or implicated in the research. Ellis (2007) argues for a focus on relational ethics based on mutual respect, dignity and connectedness. Smith (as cited in Mutch, 2005) argues that insider research has to be ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. Lang (2012) argues that “the first *ethical* step towards research engagement begins with self and that this introspection must continue throughout the research process” (p. 23). In order to address these ethical considerations the following framework has been used in this research.

1. A variety of data sources has been used to collect data
2. The auto-component of autoethnography is linked to the etho-component by interpreting and analysing narratives in the contexts of situated learning in which they were experienced.
3. Self-reflexivity is built into the research framework.
4. Some experiences have been reconstructed to protect the identity of the people involved. This process involved constructing narratives that featured enough aspects to be accurate in terms of meaning.
5. Experiences that were not able to be reconstructed in a way that protects the identity of the people involved and/or maintains the meaning of the experience have been omitted.
6. Experiences that would reflect an individual being overtly disrespectful or racist towards me have been omitted. There is a risk the individual would identify themselves and I do not want to unintentionally shame them.

7. There has been supervisory guidance throughout the project regarding ethical considerations.

Fleischman (2002) states that “the committed meditator seeks the least harm for all beings in all situations” (p. 24). My intention is to produce a research project that not only reflects my direct lived experiences but also has the practice of non-harmfulness underpinning the methodological framework and methods. It is the hope that this autoethnography can highlight inequities in dominant discourses in a way that is ethical and non-divisive, as the need to be accurate does not outweigh the need to be loving.

In this chapter I have outlined the epistemology and methodology underpinning this research. I have also described how personal documentation, poetry, and meditation are used as data in this research, and summarised ethical considerations related to this thesis. The next chapter provides synopses (constructed narratives based of practice) that reflect my experiences in social learning systems from the first two years of my training.

Chapter Four. Counsellor Identity in Training

This chapter outlines three synopses of experience that occurred within my first two years of counsellor training. Each synopsis begins with my narrative of practice, which I then interpret through the lens of a social learning system, and then outline how this influenced my identity development as a counsellor. I then outline how reflective or reflexive practice allows new insights to emerge and how these insights enable me to develop and/or transform my identity within social learning systems.

Synopsis One: In the Beginning

*Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do,
it is an experience of identity.*

Etienne Wenger (1998, p. 215)

This synopsis outlines how experiences on my first postgraduate counselling course impacted on my identity development.

In Practice

The UC Research Report 2012 was titled *Be prepared to change the world*. It outlined research that postgraduate students were undertaking and the impact it was having in the community. When I read the report as an undergraduate student considering further study, I became aware that scholarship need not just be about individual academic achievement. It had the potential to be much more. As a consequence, when I began a Master in Counselling, in 2013, I thought

academia was laying the foundation for me to contribute to society and potentially help change the world.

The major aims of my first counselling course were to explore issues relevant to the practice of counselling and psychology, provide students with the basic skills to conduct an effective therapeutic interview in the context of their developing understanding of theory, and to gain an integrated understanding, informed by students' examination of their own values and beliefs, of several major theories of counselling and psychological interventions. As such, I spent the year learning about the major theorists and skills that originate from these theories, with one session provided by a Maori researcher on Maori Theories of Wellbeing. Actually, that isn't *technically* correct. The course didn't cover all the main theorists.

Absent were entire chapters from within the course textbook; Multicultural Psychotherapy Theories, Transcultural Psychotherapy, Feminist Therapy, Lesbian and Gay Therapy, and Integrating Spiritual/Religious Issues.

Interdisciplinary developments in the science of relationships that could bring new lenses to old perspectives were also absent.

As part of the course I took the Theoretical Orientation Scale (Jones -Smith, 2012), and scoring highest on multicultural orientation, multicultural psychotherapy theories were, (and still are) my preferred theoretical base for

counselling practice. My second highest was feminist therapies. Later in the year I have to name my integrated theory of practice based on both my own values and beliefs, and the course content, (an assignment worth 35% of my final mark). I face a conundrum. The theories that integrate with my own values and beliefs have not been included in the course content. In order to pass I have to realign my values and beliefs to reflect those of the theorists included in the course. It becomes clear to me that to achieve a Master of Counselling I must first become a Master of Compliance.

An Identity of Belonging

I remember back to the day I walked into my first postgraduate course, wondering about the possibilities for a collaborative, collegial future for a trainee counsellor in a neoliberal university. Over time, course participants developed relationships with each other through informal discussions and shared course tasks and assignments. From this process of mutual engagement a CoP of postgraduate counsellors emerged. I began to develop an identity as a trainee counsellor by belonging to this CoP.

Engagement

Wenger (1998) argues that there are three distinct modes of belonging contributing to identity formation. The first is *engagement* in which CoP participants are actively involved in negotiating meaning with each other, and from within that shared reality, are able to construct an identity. Through interactions with others on the course and participation in course practices I was

involved in the process of negotiating meaning within the CoP. When I engaged in discussions with other participants about the importance of developing multicultural perspectives they politely listened to my concerns; however they did not share them. They still spoke confidently about the course content and what they hoped to achieve. The meaning I constructed from these discussions and the fact that multicultural perspectives were omitted from the course, allowing other approaches to be privileged, is that multicultural perspectives were not as important as other perspectives, and certainly not profiled to the extent I hoped they would be. At the time the fact that I could not identify with the theories taught did not overly concern me. Whilst I was aware that my values and beliefs did not align with the theorists presented I assumed after I had discussions with colleagues, the omitted chapters might not be relevant, or might be out of date with new research. *Maybe cultural influences are more of a predominant factor at an applied level instead of a theoretical one? Perhaps when I am a skilled practitioner I will have techniques that negate the need to acknowledge cultural considerations? Perhaps I'm just taking things a little too seriously?* As a trainee counsellor I stay silent, trusting the experience of the lecturers to teach me the necessary knowledge to develop my practice. As such I don't feel invalidated or marginalised, just irrelevant at this point in the training. I assume my views, values and beliefs might be relevant later. Somewhere.

Imagination

The second mode of belonging that Wenger (1998) identifies that contributes to identity development is *imagination* which he defines as a creative process that enables someone to transcend time and place, and imagine images of self and the generation of new relationships that

expand the self's identity. When I read the UC Research Report 2012 and imagined myself as a postgraduate student completing research, I produced images of myself and the world that then became integral parts of my identity development. I could see beyond the experience of training to a future where I could be a professional counsellor. Yet Wenger states that the use of imagination within a CoP is not merely an individual creative process. As the course progressed and the CoP of trainee counsellors had increased social interaction we began to share our best hopes for our studies and career development. We were all using the creative process of imagination to construct our future identities, envisaging ourselves fully qualified, in a diverse range of professional roles. I imagined a future identity as a counsellor that was somehow linked to studying and researching cultural influences. Because of my *imagination* I was able to see beyond the assignment to a time when I would be able to focus on multicultural considerations in counselling.

Alignment

Alignment is the third important component of belonging because it enables participants within a CoP to coordinate their energies on a large scale, beyond engagement and imagination. As a trainee counsellor I was interested in how my identity was being shaped by cultural influences and how I could maintain a sense of therapist congruence as I negotiated multiple discourses and practice. According to Jones-Smith (2012), as countries become more culturally and racially diverse, there has been a shift from traditional monocultural therapeutic approaches towards multicultural perspectives in counselling. This movement occurred as clients and therapists became aware that “culture is often a ‘silent intruder’ in the therapeutic relationship” (Jones-Smith,

2012, p. 293). In discussions with other trainees I did not meet anyone else who wanted to explore cultural influences in counselling practice. Even though we participated in mutual engagement and the practice of imagination I struggled to build relationships with them that might align as broader enterprises in the future. To some degree I did align with the CoP by going along with the course activities even though they did not reflect my own interests. This experience of alignment was a demonstration of my ability to use my own power which in turn helped shape my identity. This feeling of power meant I did not feel powerless within the practices and was still able to identify as someone who belonged within the CoP.

At this time I would have been experiencing what Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) call the second phase of counsellor professional development: the beginning student phase. My doubt, and dependency on more advanced members of the counselling community for guidance can be seen as typical for this stage, as can my desire to identify with a model of counselling. In fact Rønnestad and Skovholt state they “cannot emphasize enough the intensity by which students search for viable models” (p. 13). They argue for the need for beginning students to learn models, approaches and frameworks they can adopt quickly and that “hopefully can be applied to all clients” (p. 13). Because at that stage I had yet to begin working with clients I could only hope that what I was learning I would be able to apply to all clients. At that time I was not overly concerned as I maintained an open attitude to learning - an attitude Rønnestad and Skovholt state is critical at this stage of development.

In terms of a narrative approach to identity development at that stage I referred to myself as a trainee counsellor - not even a beginning counsellor. If counsellor education is about students and counsellor educators co-authoring a narrative of professional identity (Winslade, 2002) then my current narrative was that I was a trainee counsellor with much to learn, who belonged to a CoP of postgraduate counsellors.

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

Each evening before bed I read from the stack of books on my bedside table. Even though I enjoy reading prose, it is the wisdom of poetry that I turn to each day for revelation and repair. Even though I do not intend for it to be, reading poetry often becomes a reflective practice with regards to developing my identity as a counsellor. It is a reflective practice because it enables me to revisit experiences so I can process them critically in order for any new awareness to improve my future practice (Finlay, 2008). One poem that seemed to call to me at that time was *Urban Law* by Alison Hawthorne Deming.⁵

Urban Law

Rush hour and the urban outflow pours
across the Million Dollar Bridge. I wait
for the walk-light, cross-traffic slight but
caution's the rule when the city roars
toward all its separate homes. I get
the sign, little electric man, and step
into the street. A woman turns into
my lane, bearing down, eye-contact,
and still she guns it until I stare and
shake my head in disbelief at her

⁵ Excerpted from *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed* by Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Quinn Patton. Copyright © 2006 Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Q. Patton. Reprinted by permission of Vintage Canada/Random House Canada, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited.

ferocity. She slows begrudged to let
me pass, runs down the window of her Saab
and shouts, "Why don't you wait for the light?"
and flips me the bird. I feel weepy like
a punished child, mind sinking to lament,
What's wrong with the human race? Too many
of us, too crowded, too greedy for space-
we're doomed, of course, so I head for coffee
and a muffin, walking sad and slow on
the return. I'm waiting again to cross,
picking fingersful of muffin from the
paper sack and watching the phalanx of
cars race by, not even a cell of a
thought in my mind that I might jump the change,
when a man who's got the green stops,
an executive wearing a crisp white
shirt and shiny red tie, and he raises
his palm to gesture me safely across,
making all the cars behind him wait while
I walk, and together at rush hour that
man and I redeem the whole human race.

As a form of reflective practice poetry enables me to explore my feelings about events in a creative and intuitive manner that I am unable to access using solely cognitive methods. After reading the poem, the woman's experience begins to resonate within me. She has not been seen, even though she has the light. Her needs are being placed secondary to the needs of others. Subtly the poem re-minds me at a sensory level so I am able to feel her experience of having her needs invalidated. This experience of sensory re-minding reflects the view of De Shazer, (as cited in Richardson, 1993, p. 705) who states that poetry is:

a concentration of the power of language which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe. It is as if forces we can lay claim to in no other way become present to us in sensuous form.

As I feel the injustice of her situation, I begin to remember and reframe my own experiences of injustice on the course and new cognitions begin to emerge. The prescriptive nature of the assignment and the omission of chapters from the course text mean my beliefs and views are invalidated. I am being marginalised.

Identity Development: A Trainee Counsellor

Even though I know I am only in my first year as a trainee counsellor I no longer believe my voice is irrelevant at this stage of my counsellor identity development. The poem has enabled me to remember and reframe my experiences, by resonating with the feelings of the woman in the poem. Through poetry I have been able to look outside of myself to discover something within myself. As I resonated with the woman's experience I began to acknowledge my own feelings and realised that I am being marginalised as practices within the postgraduate counselling CoP do not leave room for me to negotiate meaning. Now I am able to frame my experience as a practice of non-participation.

Wenger (1998) states that our identities within a CoP are molded by a combination of both participation and non-participation. As a newcomer to the CoP there is a necessary degree of non-participation; I am not yet a full participant because I do not fully know how to participate in course processes. This type of non-participation Wenger terms *peripherality*. I might be on the periphery but I am on an inbound trajectory. An important aspect of engagement within a CoP is the formation of trajectories (Wenger, 1998). Because my preferred theoretical stance is not included in the course to some extent I am prevented from full participation within the

postgraduate counselling CoP, and my experience becomes partially one of non-participation.

Although I am not a full participant I feel I am on an inbound trajectory with the probability that in the future I will become a full participant in the CoP. In addition I develop an outbound trajectory knowing that one day I will leave the community and become a fully qualified and competent counsellor.

However, Wenger (1998) posits that there is another practice of non-participation, *marginality* in which practices push participants into an identity of non-participation. The prescriptive nature of the assignment and the omission of chapters from the course are practices that lead to marginality as a form of non-participation because I am unable to negotiate meaning within the postgraduate counselling CoP. By being kept in a marginal position I am prevented from full participation within it.

I might have been naive to think the postgraduate counselling CoP would be interested in exploring my narrative of the future, yet as Upritchard (2011) argues, complex systems in social sciences need to include future narratives in order to capture the complexity of the system. If the CoP cannot provide space for my current and future narrative I worry that, not only does this structure not provide a framework for my practice, it does not provide space for me either. I am being pushed into an identity of non-participation. Someone else's truth is being privileged. And their privilege means they do not have to know my truth (Wise & Jhally, 2008). Indeed, if I am being prepared to change the world; it will be on someone else's terms.

Synopsis Two: Colour Blind

The following account outlines a client interaction on my first placement at a community agency. I have included this experience as a critical incident. Critical incident research targets incidents that are an impetus for change (Furr & Carroll, 2003). At the time I did not realise the significance of this event. It is only retrospectively that I view this experience as a catalyst that significantly shaped my practice, and in doing so, my identity. Schon (1983) refers to the process of looking back on an action in order to process it further as “reflection-on-action”.

Practice

We’re sitting in the counselling session sharing food, a practice we’ve engaged in since the second session. Each weekly session begins with the sharing of food (which one or both of us bring) and polite inquiry about the general well-being of family members (both hers and mine) before the session formally begins.

What? What did she just say? Brown? The client has just told me how much she appreciates being able to talk to someone who is brown. *What am I supposed to say to that?* Seconds tick by as I reorient myself. *Yes, I am Brown, and a counsellor. For some reason it’s important to her. I need to respond.* I do so with a minimal encourager, a short phrase used in counselling to acknowledge a client’s response without implying approval or disapproval (Hill, 1978). I am somewhat relieved when it works and she begins to speak again. I stay in role as she explains further, knowing that I have my own stories about why it’s sometimes “nice to talk to someone Brown”, yet keenly aware my stories do not belong here.

I'm on placement in a social agency and this is the first time a client has openly acknowledged my skin colour. It would not be the last.

Identity Development: A Beginning Counsellor

Over the coming months I am regularly chosen by clients because of my ethnicity. Clients phone reception requesting someone Maori/Pasifika/not *pakeha*⁶. Clients would make assumptions about what I would understand because of my ethnicity, and whereas I initially sought to challenge these assumptions, I no longer did. The assumptions worked for the clients and I didn't find them a barrier to therapeutic change.

The narratives of these clients often told me they were seeking validation, normalisation and empathy – for someone to hear and to witness the injustice in their experience. Most importantly they wanted someone who could understand their experience. As a consequence clients were choosing me, a Brown counsellor because they wanted to tell their story to someone who they thought could understand their worldview because of the colour of their skin.

Even though ethnicity and culture may not have been the presenting issue – the impact it had on their lives was significant. Yet I was often surprised at just how clearly clients could describe injustices or inequity in their lives, but how their narratives failed to identify the oppressive structures and systems underpinning these. Because of this they felt a high level of individual responsibility for issues, when a broader view of systemic influences could have highlighted a

⁶ Merriam Webster dictionary defines the term *pakeha* as a noun, often capitalised, meaning a person who is not of Maori descent, *especially* : a white person

more realistic view of their presenting difficulties. When we were able to explore these broader issues, it created room for the client to be more gentle with themselves. Yes, they still had responsibility for their life and ownership of their issues, but importantly they could see firstly, they were not alone, and secondly, not everything was due to some failure or deficit on their behalf.

Wampold (2001) states that given the prevalence of issues connected with race, ethnicity and culture, it is always important for a client to choose a counsellor that is sensitive to the client's cultural issues and who shares the client's worldview. Wampold argued that "a therapeutic approach that considers multiculturalism is important for all clients" (p. 226). Jones-Smith (2012) also believes that "clients stand a chance of benefiting from therapists who understand the role of oppression and social and economic injustice in their lives" (p. 312). But Jones-Smith goes one step further, putting the responsibility back on the counsellor by cautioning that "counselors can no longer ethically treat clients if they do not understand the cultural influences in the therapeutic relationship" (p. 293). Since therapy is primarily a Euro-American activity, therapists need to be aware of how their biases may clash with the worldview of a culturally different client (Sue, D.W., & Sue, D., 1999). Yet the clients I had were going beyond what the research was suggesting. They were highlighting the need for professionally trained counsellors of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Personal experience tells me I do not have to hold the same ethnic/racial background in order to be competent with a client. Yet, whilst a counsellor does not have to be the same ethnicity as the

client in order to provide counselling, the client's perceived similarity does influence the speed at which a therapeutic alliance can be established (Sue, D.W., & Sue, D., 2003). Jones-Smith (2012) states "it is important that therapists discuss the client's preference or reaction to a therapist of a different ethnic/racial or cultural background" (p. 313). What does this in effect mean for me? Should I be checking with pakeha clients how they feel about engaging with me as a counsellor? Often my ethnicity was raised by pakeha clients at the start of a session after I introduced myself, and then asked if they had any questions. Sometimes they would ask, "Where's your family from?", to which I would reply, "Christchurch" (the city we were in). One pakeha client wanted to know if she could speak to me about the practices of her partner, without me being biased, as she assumed from my appearance that I came from the same ethnic background as him (I didn't).

Although I didn't directly let them know, the client's perspective often reflected my own experiences. They spoke about various issues related to ethnicity and inequality: what it was like to be marginalised in their own city, or to have their insider status repositioned to outsider, to have their values and beliefs ignored or invalidated; to be made invisible. This reflects the findings of Sue D.W, and Sue, D. (1999), that the counselling session can be viewed as a microcosm of race relations within society. In Christchurch, Brown is never just a colour.

My experiences of being Brown did not make me an expert on being Brown. hooks (1994) refers to individuals that blend both experiential and analytical ways of knowing, as holding a privileged standpoint that "does not emerge from the 'authority of experience' but rather from the passion of experience, the passion of remembrance" (p. 90). As much as I would have liked

to have been, I could not claim to be one of the types of individuals to which Hooks refers to because my counsellor training did not include multicultural perspectives and because of this I lacked the analytical foundation for practice. I felt frustrated about the lack of cultural diversity in counselling. I also felt powerless because I did not know what I could do or who I could speak to that would make a difference for clients. My fear was that by doing nothing I was contributing to the ongoing privileging of pakeha perspectives.

During this period, in my first year of training, I have been open to new learning and to exploring how ethnicity and culture shape the experiences of clients in the counselling process. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) consider this attitude of openness to learning as an important feature of the beginning student phase as it facilitates professional growth through exploration and experimentation. As a beginning counsellor I also needed to be aware of countertransference which Jones-Smith identifies as any “unconscious attitude or behaviour on the part of the therapist that is prompted by the therapist’s needs rather than the client’s needs” (2012, p. 48). Schwig et al. had earlier noted that countertransference could shape my emotional reactions to clients (2010). I did not openly share my experiences of discrimination during the sessions with clients, but my experiences certainly influenced my willingness to engage in discussions related to culture and discrimination.

I decided to share my frustrations with my counselling colleagues at the agency where I was on placement, because at times we are all actively struggling with aspects of our practice. I explained the responsibility placed on me due to my ethnicity and expressed frustration for

clients in Christchurch and the lack of multiculturally trained counsellors. My colleagues listened and acknowledged how each of us brought a unique skill set based on our experiences, and although we may choose eventually to specialise, we all have a responsibility to develop inclusive practice. We began to discuss how we could utilise each others skills, and committed to calling for greater diversity in counsellor training. I felt supported.

When I discussed my individual experiences with my postgraduate counselling CoP they appeared far less interested in (or concerned about) multicultural practice than I was. Even though they could see gaps and omissions in the training they did not feel the same sense of responsibility, as I did, to become skilled in working with our diverse multicultural community. When I asked my pakeha colleagues about this, they told me they had never had the experience of being chosen because of their ethnicity. Although they could see how working with a diverse community might be an issue for me, our discussions revealed it was not currently an issue for them. I could not help but wonder if it had been for any of their clients? Their responses reflect the findings of Ponterotto et al. (as cited in Jones-Smith, 2012) who developed a staged cultural/racial/identity model for White counsellor trainees. Ponterotto et al. found that White counselling trainees generally had not thought about the multicultural considerations inherent in counselling and psychotherapy. As a consequence during Stage 1 Ponterotto et al. found that the counsellor trainees “unconsciously or intentionally tend to perpetuate various forms of institutional racism, sexism, or other types of cultural oppression as they attempt to ‘treat all clients in the same manner’” (Jones-Smith, 2012, p. 311).

The discussion with colleagues within the CoP at the agency and the postgraduate counselling CoP helped me to develop my identity through the use of negotiated experience. Wenger (2010) states that “we define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as by the ways we and others reify our selves” (p. 133). As I discover my effect on the world, and develop relations with others, these layers begin to construct an identity built from the complex interplay between participative experience and reificative projections (Wenger, 1998). As such my identity in practice is being shaped not by my self-image but socially through the lived experience of participation in practice.

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

I had recently discovered the poetry of Ian McCrorie, and this untitled one from his 2012 collection *Children of Silence and Slow Time* becomes meaningful for me at this stage of my identity development.⁷

I create all my own problems.

In fact, I am my very own problem.

If I watch very carefully I see
that I magnify each and every event.

My agitation, my excitement, my anger
precipitates, preconditions, predetermines
the ensuing eruption.

It is not my problems that need solving;
It is the preconditioning mind states
that need dissolving.

⁷ From *Children of Silence and Slow Time* by Ian McCrorie. Copyright 2012 Ian McCrorie. Reprinted by permission of Pariyatti Press.

Solving problems is akin
to handing the Titanic's captain a cork.
Dissolving preconditions
is giving him radar.

I silently reflect on McCrorie's poem. Finlay (2008) states that introspection as a form of reflective practice "involves the practitioner in solitary self-dialogue in which they probe personal meanings and emotions" (p. 6). I realise how reactive I have become and it highlights the need to address my preconditioning mind by resuming daily meditation practice, a practice I had let slip for several weeks. When I do resume meditation, thoughts of anger and frustration at my colleagues arise during the meditation and pass away and new insights begin to emerge. This is in keeping with Finlay's (2002) assertion that as well as investigating personal experience and meanings for their own sake, "insights can emerge from personal introspection which then form the basis of a more generalized understanding and interpretations" (p. 214). I become less judgemental towards my postgraduate counselling cohort for not feeling the need to upskill in multicultural practice. I also just simply accept the fact that multicultural perspectives were not included in the course. Hetherington (2009) posits that when we meditate "we become more available to other people and useful to society" (p. 12). Daily meditation practice transforms my personal reactive anger into something stronger - determination. Now new possibilities begin to emerge showing me how I might take control of my own practice and move forward.

I decide to take on an additional external supervisor - one for counselling cultural supervision. Engaging in professional supervision was a course requirement, and it is also mandatory for

membership of the NZAC. Although membership of the NZAC is not mandatory for counsellors, I became a student affiliate of the NZAC in 2013 and have engaged with a variety of external supervisors over the past three years. My goal in seeing a third supervisor is to address my knowledge deficit and ensure my practice is robust. I am now paying for three supervisors. The first is a main supervisor for my practice, the second is to address a specialist issue a client is facing, and now a third for cultural supervision. The added cost when I am not employed is significant, but it enhances my peace of mind, and I believe it is a professional necessity.

Identity Development

Daily meditation practice is reflexive practice par excellence. By the daily practice of sitting, I am more able to be with reality as it is, not as I want it to be, a point similar to that of Bager-Charleson's (2010) position that "reflexivity implies that we arrive at the closest we can get to an objective account" (p. 18). Through Vipassana I am able to see that I create the reality in which I live, and that within me is the way out of suffering (Fleishman, 2012). I can feel how my thoughts and actions have been harmful. More importantly, I am re-tuned towards peace. Those who meditate are able to cultivate equanimity and a sense of deep inner peace (Pagis, 2015). As I sit each morning and evening any tensions in my mind can be felt through sensation as the experience of *anicca* [a Pali term often translated as impermanence]: sensations arise and then pass away. Through this technique of systematic self-observation the nature of impermanence is obvious at an experiential level, not merely an intellectual one. The resulting experience of equanimity can be difficult to describe. In trying to explain the experience of equanimity one Vipassana meditator said, "No matter how much you write about it, it only

circles around the actual experience. It does not really represent it” (Pagis, 2015, p. 46). At this stage of my counsellor identity development I am meditating twice a day.

Beyond the constraints of thought and language I am able to ground myself and reconnect with peace. Using this silent, inner process reactive and habitual patterns of thought and behaviour are excavated from the depths of my mind. This is in contrast with Irving and Williams (1995) contention that counsellors need to engage in critical thinking as reflective practice in order to examine their thoughts and beliefs. They state that, “intricate patterns of thinking can only be accessed through words - that is, through a conceptual analysis of our own psychological make-up” (p. 108). My experience of meditation would suggest otherwise in that I rely on the observation of body sensations to expose my thinking. This is similar to Dallos and Stedmon’s (2009) position that “reflective practice is multilayered, concerning itself as much with sensory and bodily experiences as with verbal, and higher-level intellectual and cognitive processes” (p. 20).

The use of an introspective embodied technique of reflexivity is also supported by Pagis (2009) who states that language is not a necessarily a component of self-reflexivity. Instead of needing to participate in an external or cognitive process to check my patterns of thinking and actions within the CoP, I can *feel* when my counselling practice has been loving and compassionate: I can also feel when it has not. Rosin (2015) states that counsellors should use “personal development strategies that promote the nonrational and exploration of the unconscious realm” to assist them to develop self-reflective capabilities necessary for reflective practice (p. 94). Even

though I do not consider the practice of meditation to be non rational, it does enable unconscious reactions to surface.

Through meditation, the internal process of being with my lived reality, qualities within me that promote greater social cohesion are strengthened. These include: becoming more positive, less reactive, becoming more available to others and developing selfless love and compassion (Hetherington, 2009). I am no longer fearful that I am participating in counselling practices that privilege pakeha perspectives. By resuming my meditation practice I am experiencing some of the benefits of meditation: taking control to change myself for the better, renewed energy, being less judgemental as well as increased concentration and compassion, all elements that Hetherington (2009) identifies as benefits of meditation. I feel agentic: able to act to bring about change in my life in order to best serve my clients.

With less judgement and greater acceptance I feel energised. I need to be able to construct an identity that, as Winslade (2002) notes is not self-contained, but is continually negotiated in relationship. I decide to increase my workload – to not only learn the texts required for successful completion of the counselling coursework but to also learn the chapters from the main textbook that were omitted from the course. This is not about my need to have my own beliefs validated, rather it's about ensuring safe practice. Most importantly it is also about equity.

Because I am completing my Master of Counselling in a bicultural country I realise the need to extend my foundational knowledge and therefore enrol in an extra two university courses at UC

in *Aotahi*: School of Māori and Indigenous Studies. Both classes prove to be transformative. It wasn't just the scholarship of the staff at Aotahi I needed access to: it was their humanity. The lecturers are passionate, with strong beliefs that they are not afraid to share. A typical class involves reading three to four inspiring and provocative papers prior to the class, and then spending two hours of class time discussing the readings. Each member of the class is given ample time to share their views, and there is time to listen and be shaped by the views of others. As a consequence, I have sufficient time to take knowledge into my body and have a visceral and cognitive reaction to it.

The concept of participation is more encompassing than simple engagement in practice, and consequently, when I complete the courses at *Aotahi* I take a new sense of identity with me. The social engagement has strengthened my identity as a scholar and as a counsellor. After the courses I feel fully engaged as a scholar and I am able to make clear connections between evidence-based practice, and my practice as a counsellor with clients from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Synopsis Three: A New Year Begins

Lave and Wenger's (1999) concept of legitimate peripheral participation relates to newcomers and full participants engaging in the social practice of learning. It could be used to describe the common practice in New Zealand counsellor training where students undertake practical course placements as an intern within community institutions. The following synopsis provides an

overview of my experiences as an intern in my second year of training as I participated in a counselling CoP which formed around the need to provide effective supervision for interns within the counselling department.

In Practice

In an environment of diverse demands coupled with supportive and experienced colleagues, I thrived. Each week we gathered for peer supervision, to reflect on and develop professional and ethical practice. It was stimulating to witness and participate in such a clear process of supportive practice. Points of tension and disagreement weren't brushed over or necessarily resolved; they were acknowledged and therefore validated. As a team we did not always agree, but these disagreements were acknowledged openly, with discussions often continuing beyond the meeting. The meaning I took from this experience of participation was that the CoP was respectful of diverse perspectives, and their opinions would not be judged. Although I never brought my own issues to the table, the contribution I made to discussions was valued. I *felt* like I was part of the team. I frequently left the meetings in awe of my colleagues abilities and invigorated by the potential for our profession.

Identity and Meaning

At the beginning of the placement in the second year I did not foresee any difference between my last placement as a first year student, and this one except the fact that my levels of experience

and ability had changed. I still considered myself to be a beginning counsellor but when I discussed my current role I always referred to myself as an intern. The genesis of this practice was when the head of department introduced me to other counsellors as an intern counsellor. It wasn't how I would have described myself at that stage (I would still have said I was a beginning counsellor), yet it was more accurate. I had not placed any importance on the terms of self-reference beyond knowing I was a *trainee counsellor* (not having client contact), and then I would be a *beginning counsellor* (with client contact) until I had a paid counselling role when I could refer to myself as a *counsellor*. Identifying at the start as an *intern* meant I already felt that the CoP at my placement knew I had enough experience to contribute to negotiating the meaning of practices.

Meaning within the CoP framework is not simply about learning the meaning of practices. Negotiating meaning is a dynamic process whereby identity development is influenced by the ability (or inability) to construct meanings that frame the CoP, and the modes of belonging within it (Wenger, 1998). As an intern I engage with two processes that Wenger states are fundamental to the concept of the negotiation of meaning: participation and reification.

Participation and reification form a crucial duality that is central to the concept of communities of practice. *Participation* in a CoP is a complex process which is both active and social (Wenger, 1998). It necessitates a synthesis of multiple ways of being and seeing, between members who mutually recognise one another as belonging to the CoP, and who are able to influence each other's meaning of experiences. Wenger describes the concept of *reification* as "the process of

giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into ‘thingness’”(p. 58). There can be a huge variety of forms of reification in that it can refer to a process as well as its product. He warns that participation and reification must balance each other in order to have continuity of meaning. If participation dominates, coordination of meaning and divergent views become difficult. If reification dominates, possibilities for joint negotiation and shared experience can be limited, reducing participation and therefore stifling synchronised, relevant or emergent meaning (Wenger, 1998).

Participation as a concept is broader than just engaging in the practices of a CoP. It is an active process requiring *mutual recognition*, where participants recognise in each other the ability to negotiate meaning. When I attend peer supervision, and other shared events it enables the possibility of mutual recognition because other members of the CoP recognise me as a member, or at least as potential member. Mutual recognition does not necessarily mean equality in terms of practice. The questions I ask at supervision indicate that I am an intern. Instead of focusing on my lack of experience, my colleagues acknowledge the new perspectives I bring to discussions. By attending peer supervision I develop what Wenger refers to as an “identity of participation” through social engagement with other participants in the CoP. I am seen as a newcomer and an intern. This aspect of identity means I do not yet have full participation within the CoP but my participation infers to other participants that I am on an inbound trajectory towards it.

The process of weekly peer supervision is also an example of *reification*, a process in which experience from the counselling CoP is given form. As a reified process supervision carries

significant meaning for my colleagues who are already familiar with the historical practices of the CoP. By participating in the reification I am able to influence practice, and negotiate meanings for myself about practice that reflect my experience, the practices of my colleagues and the shared history of practice within the CoP. Fundamentally the reification of supervision cannot be viewed as a concrete definitive process. It is instead a reflection of the practices of its participants. Reification then, is part of a duality with participation (Wenger, 1998). It is this duality that enabled me to negotiate the meanings of my experiences in the CoP and my identity.

When my colleagues helped me participate in the school experiences beyond the counselling CoP I did not initially understand the importance of these broader practices. I thought the practices were enjoyable but not an essential part of learning to be an effective counsellor. Yet as Wenger (1998, p. 52) posits “practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life”. As a trainee counsellor I had considered practice to be about the skills and techniques associated with counselling. During my first placement and now this internship (second placement), I came to realise the importance of the social relationships beyond the need to just get on well with other people. Practical support extended beyond formal counselling practices, into being a member of the wider staff. Whenever possible my colleagues made an effort to introduce me to other members of staff. They also made sure I knew where to sit in the staff room and gave me a brief history of who sat where and why, and how the staffroom operated as a social learning system. Colleagues informally supported me with surprises of coffee and chocolate on stressful days, lectures about the importance of breaks, and making sure I was not alone at morning tea and lunch. There were fun conversations about where to buy shoes/perfume/chocolate, shared stories

about our families, and informal introductions to members of the wider school community. I enjoyed our interactions and arrived at placement each morning eager to reconnect with colleagues. It was this mutual engagement with others that enabled me to play a part in a CoP therefore develop my identity as a member. Snyder and Wenger (2010, p. 110) state that developing and disseminating knowledge:

depends on informal learning much more than formal – on conversation, storytelling, mentorships, and lessons learned through experience. This informal learning, in turn, depends on collegial relationships with those you trust and who are willing to help when you ask. Informal learning activities and personal relationships among colleagues are the hallmarks of communities of practice.

As I learn the practice of counselling I participate in another component of engagement - unfolding *histories of practice*. That is not a passive process where I just acquire the practices that are passed from one generation of counsellors to the next. Practice is emergent structure formed by dynamic interactional processes that develop a shared history of learning. It is an emergent process whereby as a newcomer I engage in evolving types of mutual engagement within the community of practice which enable me to negotiate meaning therefore constructing a shared history of practice.

Even though the placement was for two and a half days a week it was understood that I had other responsibilities, and if I needed time to address those I was welcome to take it. My identity beyond the CoP also contributed to my identity within it. I was a mother, a co-parent, a full-time

student, and an eldest daughter with responsibilities to extended family. Because I had lost a home in each of the two recent earthquakes in September 2010 and then February 2011, and I had multiple earthquake related processes I needed to engage in, I was extremely grateful that demands beyond the CoP were acknowledged and respected. I belonged to many CoPs outside of the placement, and felt supported by the counselling CoP as they acknowledged my multi-membership, allowing me space to reconcile the obligations from various CoP. This process of reconciliation allowed me to create bridges between practices and became part of my identity within the counselling CoP.

Within Rønnestad and Skovholt's (2003) phased framework of counsellor professional development I would now be considered in the advanced student phase - an intern towards the end of training. At this phase Rønnestad and Skovholt consider that students are typically conservative and cautious, tend towards excessive responsibility and have extensive external dependency. I received extensive support from all members of the counselling team. As an intern, I had been placed with a senior counsellor who monitored my workload. Counsellors were available to me whenever I needed support, and I felt my contribution to the department's work was appreciated.

My experience is similar to Rønnestad and Skovholt's finding that supervision can be a potent source of influence for advanced students. As well as peer supervision with the whole team, I met with another intern counsellor and a placement supervisor for supervision each week. It provided a safe space in which to discuss issues, whether it be with the placement, a client or a

colleague. I could reveal my ignorance, and have the issue framed in a way that honoured my experience while also having it explored through multiple perspectives. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003, p. 14) refer to supervision at this stage as “mostly positive” or in some cases “non-confirming” although these terms do not reflect the depth of my participation in group supervision which I experienced as more of a dynamic process of negotiating meaning. It was this negotiated experience that was ultimately enabling me to construct an identity as a competent intern counsellor.

As the year progressed my competence increased as I practiced new skills I have learnt from the CoP. I began to wonder what particular skill set I could develop, and how my practice could make a contribution to the team and the wider profession. Becoming a counsellor was proving to be more exciting and complex than just taking on the label *counsellor*, a label that as yet I did not feel confident using. My new sense of identity was conflicted. While I felt a sense of pride in being an intern counsellor at the school, there was an underlying fear that my practice might not be strong enough to ever be useful outside of this school. *Maybe I only appear to be practicing well because of the professional skills of those around me?* I still felt and identified as a beginning counsellor. Some of my first year colleagues were already considering searching for employment as a counsellor and I wondered when I would consider my practice strong enough to do the same. *When would I cease to be a beginning counsellor, and feel competent and confident enough to call myself a counsellor?*

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

Professional external supervision was crucial in helping me understand dynamics within the CoPs I participated in as a beginning counsellor. Counsellors who are members of the NZAC are required to have regular supervision with an external supervisor, in order to have “focused reflection on the counsellor’s interactions with their clients, unconscious processes and systemic and cultural issues affecting the interactions” (NZAC, 2015, p. 2). The art of supervision has many goals, such as assisting supervisees to develop their own identity as a therapist (Watkins, 1992), feel empowered and autonomous (Nelson, 1997) training and encouraging counsellors (Presbury, Echterling, & McKee, 1999) and evaluation and maintenance of the quality of practice (Maclean, 2002). My own experiences of supervision reflected these goals, particularly support to feel empowered and autonomous.

With guidance and wisdom from my main external supervisor who I saw monthly I was able to explore my emerging identity as a counsellor and the frustrations I was experiencing within my practice. He was non-judgemental and accepting of whatever I brought to supervision each month. I did not prepare session notes. This reflects the experiences of Moore (1991), who as a supervisee, believed that “whatever was most significant would emerge in the course of a session and it always did” (p. 130). Each session I just spoke off the top of my head, drawing on my embodied experiences, and trusted that whatever need to emerge, would. It always did.

My supervisor had trained in Solution-Focused Therapy and our sessions primarily involved a solution-focused approach. In supervision sessions this included elements that Thomas (2013)

propounds: amplification of my successes, using presuppositional language, future orientation, curiosity, and affirmation. When I reflected on my experiences as an intern my supervisor amplified my strengths and told me to keep noticing what was working well. What was working well was that the CoP was supportive and I was able to participate in reifications of practice with staff who appreciated my efforts, and clients who were happy with my service. The supervisor helps me see that I am developing an identity as a competent intern counsellor.

During meditation, fears about the placement emerge. Interactions, thoughts, conversations, holding tensions and fears of inadequacy...all arise to play on the screen of my mind. Paying them no attention as I continue to practice meditation, they eventually weaken and pass. I recall the multiple ways in which the team members have shared their merits. How kind they were. How accessible. The way they seemed infinitely patient with my interruptions and ignorance. I remember witnessing the competence, vulnerability and not knowing stance that the experienced senior counsellors model so effortlessly during the weekly meetings. Frequently the meditations end with strong feelings of loving kindness towards all members of the CoP.

Identity Development

As a result of meditation practice I feel more giving and less self-centered (Hetherington, 2009). *Me* and *my* views, and *my* plans seem somewhat irrelevant. Yet, how to best be of service to the profession of counselling is still important. The intention to focus my energy on how I may be useful to the profession is a notion that is discussed by Hetherington (2009) who states that meditation enables us to “become more available to other people and useful to society” (p. 17).

At this time in my training I felt less concerned about my identity as a competent counsellor and more aware of the multiple gifts of kindness and generosity I had received from colleagues within the CoP. There was a growing awareness that any identity I had, existed largely because I was the recipient of others merits. I begin to see that my successful experiences within the CoP are largely predicated on my colleagues personal practices of compassion and understanding. As I continue to sit my identity experiences became less about the need to belong, and more about selfless love and compassion. Compassion for myself and others and selfless love for my colleagues within the CoP, and also for counsellors outside of our CoP, counsellors in the wider community. Consequently, when the Head of Department suggests I cover a relief position as a counsellor, I agree to the position. Not because I wanted or needed the experience (I would have been happy to stay at the placement and see the year out) but because I was in alignment with the wider community of counsellors and I wanted to play my part.

Chapter Five: Counsellor Identity in Employment

This chapter provides three synopses of experiences that occurred in my first three years of employment as a counsellor. The chapter has the same format as the previous one: a narrative of practice followed by analysis to show the impacts of social learning systems and how these influenced my counsellor identity development. Reflective or reflexive practices are then applied to the practice, allowing new insights about my practice to emerge. I then discuss how these insights enable me to develop and/or transform my identity within social learning systems.

Synopsis One: Meaningful Practice

After completing six months relieving in my first role as a secondary school counsellor I am fortunate to be employed in another secondary school. This synopsis provides an introduction to my experience of practice within the school and how that influenced the development of my identity as a counsellor.

Practice

I hurry in, pleased to have made it on time. Because the school is significantly smaller than the one where I was an intern there is the opportunity to get to know everyone on the staff team. By now I know the informal boundaries that delineate which staff sit where for our morning staff meetings, and I grab a seat with other pastoral staff. My colleagues greet me warmly and we barely have enough time to exchange pleasantries before the meeting starts promptly at 8.00am. The Principal begins, always upbeat and positive; and where a challenge needs to be faced, he names it directly. There is a sense of being included in the

wider business of the school, beyond the limits of my position. As usual the Principal's address is brief, informative, honest, and reinforcing of good staff practices. As I sit listening I feel motivated, and very fortunate to be a member of staff.

Identity: A Novice Professional

According to Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) I would now be in the Novice Professional Phase. A feature of this phase is that counsellors report a sense of being on one's own. But I do not feel alone: I feel embraced. The relationships with my colleagues within the school and counselling colleagues in the community mitigate any sense of being by myself. I know I am part of a team who love what they do, and share their merits for the benefit of others. As such I feel supported and loved.

Every day I smile as I arrive at work and greet my colleagues, and look forward to what the day will bring. As a whole, the staff are professional and personable and we genuinely enjoy each other's company. The close and supportive staff team embrace me as one of their own, even though I'm just relieving for a term. As with my previous school there's a strong sense of collegiality amongst the staff. Both schools started the day with a staff meeting; the coming together as staff anchoring our collective practice. We physically see each other as a member of the staff and we hear about any important news that might affect our work. It helps me develop strong and effective relationships with staff from various departments including the senior leadership team who are visibly and actively engaged with the students and staff. In fact it would

be a rare day that I would not speak with each member of the senior leadership team about some aspect of practice.

I am a member of a community of practice (CoP) that supports the pastoral needs of students. Several staff work together in various ways to try to negotiate and address the most effective ways to meet the pastoral needs of the students. We share a deep sense of commitment to the students, the community, and the practice of teaching in a lower socioeconomic profile. One of the salient concepts of the CoP social theory of learning is the *negotiation of meaning* (Wenger, 1998). This process involves interactions between multiple components within a CoP including the participants, context, social relations, and both current and historical practices. Wenger (1998) states that all components are dynamically interacting and shaping one another, necessitating on-going “interpreting and acting, doing and thinking, or understanding and responding” (p. 54). These operations allow participants to constantly renegotiate meaning with regards to practice, and indeed there is daily negotiation between members of the pastoral CoP about best practice.

Communities of practice cannot be considered in isolation. They are not independent in that their work is interconnected with the rest of the world around them. Although the challenge of working in a lower decile school is acknowledged, the school does not view it as an indicator of student achievement. Core research papers are included as part of the staff induction that reinforce this view, as well as papers that highlight the bicultural reality underpinning our work. Staff are regularly updated as to the latest research affecting pedagogy and it is clear that the

senior leadership team and teachers are a community dedicated to providing students with the best pedagogical practice. In other words, the negotiated meaning of practice within the school is that all students will be able to succeed.

There are multiple ways my voice and opinions are afforded space within the school and each of these creates opportunities to negotiate meaning. Through conversations with other staff and participation in forums I am able to engage in negotiating the meaning of practices. At least once a week I speak at the staff meeting about how best to support specific needs. Through this mutual recognition I am recognised as a professional member of the team. Staff contact me about students they have concerns about and I'm able to advise them of possible courses of action, and when a referral for counselling may be necessary. This engagement contributes to my growing identity as a counsellor as the feedback from both students and staff is positive and I feel a growing sense of confidence.

As I participate in the practices of the school and notice the reification of certain practices I begin to develop an identity based on how my experiences are socially interpreted. My experiences and the reification of those experiences influence each other and as such my identity becomes a process of negotiated experience. My experience supports the argument that the social formation of an identity places the focus not on the individual, or on the collective, but on their mutual constitution (Wenger, 1998).

At this stage of my identity development I feel fortunate for having the opportunity to be part of a CoP that is so committed to supporting students and each other, and want to contribute

however possible. I can see that my identity development is not an inherently individualistic process, nor solely a collective one. Instead I am creating bonds with other participants as we create and produce a shared history, and it is this dimension of practice that also becomes a dimension of my identity (Wenger, 1998). My ability to engage actively in the negotiation of meaning means I feel as though I belong at the school, and that my counselling skills are being well utilised. The scale and depth of need in the school is vast. I know I want to spend my energy working in a low decile school and it seems like I have found my niche.

Yet working such long hours leaves me no time to complete academic study. What is the best use of my practice? To continue to work here where I am happy, or to risk moving to a new school so I have time to study, and, therefore, potentially contribute to the wider school counselling community? I don't want to leave... and I feel the need to leave. When a permanent role is advertised at the school where I had been an intern, I'm torn about whether to apply.

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

I don't consider myself a spiritual person and as a general rule do not engage with conversations or books about spirituality. Yet on a weekend wander around my neighbourhood I peruse a pile of free books someone has left at their gate and surprise myself by selecting one about spirituality in education. In it I discover a poem by Diana Chapman Walsh called *Potbound*.⁹

He asks me a question I've never considered before.

⁹ From *The Heart of Learning* edited by Steven Glazer. Copyright 1999 Steven Glazer. Reprinted by permission of Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, a member of Penguin Random House LLC.

When is it that you know you have to go someplace else?
At first I think don't know, don't go, never have, just try to
please,
do what's expected, bloom where I'm planted.
But then the answer germinates in the soil of my mind.
I see a potted plant, roots protruding from the drainage hole
in the bottom, ready to go, bursting to grow.
After weeks or months or years of putting its root system
down,
of consolidating its power, husbanding its resources, it has
reached
a crisis point, lost its equilibrium, has to go, has to grow.
I run down to the cellar and root around for a larger pot,
a little larger only, so my vulnerable plant won't wilt in the
unstructured vastness of a new world without apparent walls.
I have to smash the old pot to rescue my restless plant,
impacted root system now naked in my hand. A small
sacrifice,
but a radical operation to deliver the plant from death.
Without the space to grow, it will shrivel and die.
When is it that I know I have to go someplace else?
When I have to grow or die?

The poem had given voice to the part of me that had been wanting to avoid the inevitable feelings of sorrow that would follow any decision to leave. This type of view is articulated by Akhtar (2000) who states that “poetry serves to render mental pain bearable by enhancing empathy with one’s repudiated parts” (p. 229). It was time for me to learn the skill of sorrow. Fleischman (2004) describes sorrow as “a learned, developmental attainment of character” (p. 177). He argues that sorrow is “a higher adaptation in the human animal, which facilitates a broader engagement of reality and which we observe in those who persevere against reason, thereby catalyzing hope beyond prediction” (p. 177). If I want to consider how I may best serve the wider profession of counselling that may mean leaving behind my current cosy reality to take a step towards the unknown. Sorrow is the skill that will cradle me through that process. I have loved working here. I know I belong here. And I know it is time to let go.

Identity Development

After I interview successfully for a new position counselling colleagues send messages of congratulations. They assume I am excited about moving schools. In reality, I am full of grief. Fleischman (2004) states that “grief is the harbinger beyond the known world of yourself to the horizonless peace you seek” (p. 162). When I interview my replacement I wonder if I have made the right decision. It feels like I am leaving family. Each time I try to write my resignation letter I am tearful and the process ends up taking three weeks. The skill of sorrow is proving a hard one to master.

My colleagues at school tease me that I'm leaving the lower deciles for a retirement home because the school is in a more affluent socioeconomic area. I feel like a traitor and wonder if all of my talk about social justice amounts to anything other than wishful self-talk. Yet beyond my self-doubt and feelings of loss is the inner experience of faith. I *know* I have made the right decision, even though I *think* I haven't. I find solace in Fleischman's assertion that, "the more you care the deeper your despair and the brighter the light of your faith will be" (p. 167). The inner experiences of sorrow and faith have become an important constellation as I navigate my path of identity development as a counsellor.

Synopsis Two: Returning and Re-membering

The following outlines my thoughts and feelings about practice as I rejoin a community where I had previously been an intern but am now employed as a counsellor.

New eyes

At the weekly group supervision session I struggled to be an effective participant. Whilst I tried to listen attentively, I was very aware that five hours of staff resource were devoted to the process. With the enormous workload at my previous schools in the lower deciles it was a privilege to have time to meet. Information was shared by email and when we did meet it was to discuss creative solutions and make decisions. Now I am privileged enough to spend an hour each week listening to my colleagues discuss their issues in a way that demonstrates counsellor self-care and professional practice. After 45 minutes I at least hoped that my listening was of use. Were there any creative solutions that arose? No.

Has it enhanced my practice? No. After 55 minutes all I could think was *I do not belong here*. I sat watching the clock trying to hide my distress.

Identity: A Community of Practice?

In being surrounded by the privilege that comes from working in a high decile school I feel as though I have lost such a strong part of my identity as I struggle to negotiate meaning. *Does practicing in a high decile school make me less creative? More inwardly focused? Have I sacrificed creativity for comfort? Since we are not swamped by need are we less strategic?* I am a newcomer, just learning the ropes, that is the dynamics of how the counsellors work together. I only feel like I belong to a CoP within my sector¹⁰. I feel that the CoP that is within my sector is the space I can be creative. I do not feel the same sense of collegiality within the counselling department, which includes all the counsellors from across the school sectors: they refer to themselves as a *team*. I dare not say it, but I wonder on what grounds they make that assertion. To me we are just a group of polite colleagues with the same job title who happen to work in close proximity. Apart from similarities in our reifications (job descriptions, manuals, booking systems etc.), it does not feel like a CoP because we do not negotiate meaning within our individual sectors of practice. Beyond weekly supervision for one hour, we do not meet.

Most days we don't even greet each other when arriving. I just go into my office and begin my day. My colleagues are polite but we do not have meaningful interactions. I imagine this sense of isolation is what it feels like in private practice. As a newcomer I struggle to make sense of what

¹⁰ I was responsible for providing counselling services to a particular sector of the school - similar to the system of houses used by many schools.

is happening. *What have I done? Why did I not see this when I was an intern?* I feel flat; disconnected to counsellors both within and beyond my school and wondering what could encourage us to become a CoP.

I begin to wonder if the challenges I am facing can be viewed through the CoP concept of boundary relations - the crossing of boundaries that denote practice in one CoP from another. Every CoP has shared histories of learning that create discontinuities between participants and non-participants. In changing schools I have effectively moved from one community of practice to another, and as I endeavour to create continuities across the boundaries of these CoP there is tension. Wenger (1998) argues that boundary objects are forms of reification which can cross boundaries and allow different CoP to connect. Supervision is a product of reification; it is a requirement of counselling practice and can coordinate perspectives across the boundaries of CoP. Yet I struggle to understand the practice of supervision as a newcomer to the CoP. I try to reconcile my experiences of multi membership (which have informed my practice of supervision), with the reality I am now experiencing. I struggle to understand the usefulness of the current practice of supervision and therefore where my own practice may be useful.

In terms of identity I feel like a newcomer. Even though I had been in the practice before as an intern, now because of my employment status as a full-time permanent counsellor I am a full member, struggling to understand practice. It is a deeply unsettling place to be as I try to remain open to new practice, while viewing our practice within a wider perspective of school counselling.

Reflective and Reflexive Practice

When I meditate feelings of sadness and loss keep arising. I feel a sense of grief: I miss my former colleagues and students, and I also miss the sense of creative pressure that comes from working in a lower decile school. Now each evening when I return home I don't have to work. My relationship with my partner has improved and my child is enjoying more time with me. But I feel a sense of being disconnected from my new colleagues who don't even greet each other, let alone really engage with each other. We are not learning from each other.

I realise that I have made a mistake in thinking of the community of counsellors as a CoP. Now I am able to reread the situation using theoretical insight. It is not proximity, job titles or relationships that enable a practice to be considered a CoP. It is the formation of practice as a form of community based on three characteristics: *mutual engagement*, *shared repertoire*, and *joint enterprise* (Wenger, 1998). As well as formal practices and procedures Wenger states that a CoPs coherence is also held together in ways that are more subtle and indirect. Informal conversations help build community coherence. We do not have the informal conversations and “community maintenance” that Wenger (1998, p. 74) states are needed to transform engagement into a CoP. This type of practice is often less visible and therefore unrecognized and undervalued (Wenger, 1998). The practice of community maintenance enables engagement and without it we are disconnected.

I remember a part-time staff person who has left who had a key role in community maintenance when I was here as an intern. Every day she arrived, she greeted each one of us warmly, and

often we gravitated to her office for lunch, leaving our individual offices to share stories. There was always much laughter, and honest talk, like a gathering around a village water well. I miss her. I miss connecting with another human being happy. As I remember her joy, thoughts about my current colleagues' practices dissolve and I come to realise that the only practice I can control is my own.

Slowly meditation practice cracks open my self-absorbed views on how practice should be at the school. Finlay (2002) states that “the challenge for researchers using introspection is to use personal revelation not as an end in itself but as a springboard for interpretations and more general insight” (p. 215). As I continue to meditate I can see how I have stopped being open minded towards practice and how attached I am to my views. I can see how I am judging and dismissing the current supervision practices, and consequently withdrawing and isolating myself. As I continue to sit, the practice enables me to be open as Fleischman (2002) notes to new perspectives and embrace different viewpoints on practice simultaneously .

Identity Development

At this stage of the development of my identity as a counsellor I do feel as if I am in the Novice Professional Phase (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). I do have a sense that I am on my own as a counsellor. Because of this my relationships with colleagues in my school sector take on greater importance. I also begin to strengthen and build connections to colleagues in the counselling department. I feel welcomed as a newcomer to the school and am eager to learn how I can be effective as a counsellor within this school setting.

Synopsis Three: A School for Natives

This final synopsis examines practice and process in each of my first three years of employment at the school. The three narratives have been constructed to represent a variety of my experiences as they occurred chronologically.

Practice: First Year	Process: First Year
<p>This student has endured so much racial abuse at our school that he now only reports incidents involving physical violence. He now believes it is a “school for natives” - for people who were born here. I try to reassure him that school procedures mean we will act swiftly to address any incidents. Yet he shakes his head when I try to get him to develop a more agentic perspective. He has experienced too much to believe that any system can protect him from what occurs when teachers aren’t looking. I try to give him hope by explaining exactly how we will be dealing with this latest incident but it</p>	<p>During the session I can barely hold back my tears as I listen to the student struggle with his feelings about the latest incident of racial abuse that he has had to endure. I feel relieved once the student has left my office and I can let my tears surface. When a colleague notices I am upset and joins me to listen to my distress about the situation, I am grateful for his support as I deconstruct the session and attend to my feelings. I feel helpless. <i>Why am I even at this school? Wouldn’t I be better off in the lower deciles where I could effect change? Am I just a Brown face for other Brown faces to speak to, so they</i></p>

<p>is no use. My words are hollow when measured against his repeated experience, that tells him he does not belong in this “school for natives”.</p> <p>Practice: Second Year</p> <p>She enters my office distraught after her fifth racist incident at school. Because the incident has just occurred, as soon as she gives me a description of the perpetrators I run to search for them - determined to bring them to account for their actions. When I am unable to locate them I return to my office to comfort her.</p> <p>She is still sobbing. We hug and then sit holding hands across the table as she slowly calms. Her question catches me by surprise...“Why are people racist</p>	<p><i>feel better about how they are treated?</i></p> <p><i>Am I here so the staff feel better there is a Brown face for the students to talk to?</i></p> <p>I feel alone, ineffective and lost.</p> <p>Process: Second Year</p> <p>There are already several school-wide behaviour management processes in place. We are members of the PB4L Programme¹¹ and each term focus on one of the school values, with speeches in assembly, posters in classes and a teacher emphasis on rewarding students who demonstrate the value of focus. There is another process for managing student behaviour is a school-wide process that enables staff to report inappropriate behaviour in class. It has a series of stages which the</p>
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¹¹ PB4L School-wide is a long-term, whole-school approach to help schools develop their own social culture that supports learning and positive behaviour. The framework is evidence based. It provides us with a process for considering both learning and behaviour across the whole school, and student by student (MOE, 2015).

<p>Miss?” In that moment I am aware of the enormity of the task of being a competent school counsellor. <i>What am I to say?</i> Yes, in counselling, clients are supported to find their own answers, but this question and context is different. My supervisor had explained that school counselling has a high educative aspect. This student is asking me for perspective and it would be trite just to reflect the question back to her, or ask why she thought people were racist. We end up having a long discussion about ignorance, privilege, and power.</p> <p>Practice: Third Year</p> <p>I calmly point out, “That’s racist”. Only the subtlest of pauses indicates I have been heard before the justification of the practice continues. So I say it again, this time acknowledging our</p>	<p>student progresses through with ever increasing negative consequences at each new stage. There is also a separate process of incident reporting that students and staff can use when an incident within the school requires further investigation. In addition there is an online form for students to report bullying, where they choose whether they would like to speak to a dean or counsellor about the incident. Despite these school processes student narratives tell me there is still a pervasive social culture that condones racial abuse.</p> <p>Process: Third Year</p> <p>After three years I am a full participant in the CoP and I have much greater understanding of how privilege affects our reifications of practice. Now when we begin to engage in racist practice I</p>
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shared repertoire, “We can’t do that. It’s racist”.	am able to walk into a colleague’s office and name it.
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Identity Over Time

Students experiences like the ones outlined in this synopsis ignited my determination to address inequities that are sustained by reified practices within communities of practice.

My efforts over three years to address issues of inequity faced by minority populations of students within the school social learning system can be viewed within the CoP framework through the two components of identity - identification and negotiability. *Identification* refers to the process of how I have invested in practices through engagement, imagination and alignment that have become distinctive of my identity. Wenger (1998) posits that “identity is a locus of social selfhood and by the same token a locus of social power” (p. 207). As such I have developed an identity within school CoP as someone that advocates for minority populations. Wenger (1998) defines negotiability as the “ability, facility and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter within a social configuration” (p. 197). Over three years my practices using the complex interplay between identification and negotiability have strengthened.

In my first year I was a newcomer within the school pastoral CoP and was still learning the reifications of practice. I did not understand why the CoP was not aware of the prevalence of such racist incidents, or if they were, why data were not being collected and analysed about the frequency and nature of such incidents. Without data I struggled to get other members of the

pastoral CoP to understand the depth of the issue. The process of mutuality enabled me to be identified as a member of the CoP, yet Wenger cautions that mutuality does not necessarily mean collaboration, equality or even respect. I realised that as a newcomer to the pastoral CoP I did not have what Wenger describes as “enough legitimacy to influence the development of a practice, mobilize attention and address conflicting interests” (1998, p. 109). I have the identity of a member without the ability to negotiate and “identification without negotiability is powerlessness - vulnerability, narrowness, marginality” (Wenger, 1998, p. 208). I felt helpless and did not know what to do in order to negotiate change.

In my second year I understood the various reified practices within the wider school regarding student behaviour and knew how to engage in the negotiation of meaning surrounding them. Through mutual recognition, others within the CoP view me as a full participant and I am able to participate in the ongoing negotiation of meaning around reifications of practice. I have both the identification and negotiability to persuade other members of the pastoral CoP to revise and standardise incident report processes between sectors to allow for analysis of the prevalence of reported racial abuse across the school.

By my third year I understand how my identities within the counselling, sector and pastoral CoPs are shaped by practices of power and belonging. Similar to my second year, my practice is aligned to a sufficient degree to demonstrate that I not only belong to the CoP but I am also able to affect the negotiation of meaning within it. Yet now I understand the function of power that creates tension through the interaction between identification and negotiability. As a result, I am

able to assert my identity to negotiate new meanings for practices that affect minority populations.

Reflective and Reflexive practice

Sometimes client statements have challenged my view of myself; but my identity remained intact. Yet in situations like these, student experiences deeply challenge my identity as a counsellor. Merely reflecting on their experiences was not sufficient for my peace of mind. I needed to engage with client experiences reflexively, and the consequent realisations were transformative. Yalom (2012) refers to this process as one of the dual roles therapists have; as observer and as participant. He states that as an observer, one must be objective enough to be provide basic guidance but as a participant, one is affected and sometimes changed by encountering someone else's life.

While meditating, the students suffering unfolds in my mind. Their experiences dissipate my cosy identity as a school counsellor or a broker across boundaries of CoP. The practice of meditation dissolves thoughts about me and my identity. It does not matter what I have done, only a strong sense of determination to do more. I know now that I had mistakenly assumed that the various communities that I participated in were learning communities, that they were interested in creating new knowledge by drawing on the wisdom of peripherality (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) states that this wisdom is often not seen by full participants as it can easily become marginalised. It is the wisdom withheld by the marginalities of competence (members who are not yet full participants) as well as the marginalities of experience (certain experiences of members that are 'repressed, despised, feared, or simply ignored' (p. 216).

Meditation also enables me to loosen my views on the world, by being able to sit with the reality of a situation without needing to react to it. As I continue to sit, violent, aggressive thoughts towards colleagues arise in my mind. Even when I thought I was advocating for the needs of students I can feel that my speech has been harmful towards colleagues. Barnea-Astrog (2017) states that “those who examine themselves by using Vipassana meditation actually examine their mental activities, gradually claiming more responsibility for them” (p. 16). As I continue to observe sensations these reactive thoughts begin to pass away and a state of nonviolence suffuses my mind. This nonviolent state enables me to feel qualities that Fleischman (2002) notes: more compassion, identification and empathy. As a consequence I feel as compassionate towards colleagues as I do towards students. I am able to accept what the current practices are without judgement of the individuals I thought were responsible for those practices; and I am able to see how I contributed to those practices. There is a strong determination to continue to speak up for the needs of others, but to do so from a more empathetic and compassionate place.

Identity Development

In my third year colleagues from outside of the counselling department and my sector find their way to my office and we begin to connect around issues of student agency and advocacy.

Although our practices are not linked through a CoP or by any formal system or structure, I find solace and strength from this unplanned union of professionals who can see the suffering of students and are quietly committed to making changes. We meet in my office where on the wall I have written a meditation insight - “situations you need will find you”. We share stories that help fuel our determination to address systemic privilege that allows inequity to flourish. In the past,

these stories would have left me despairing for the students, and the school. Now the information each of us brings is able to be transformed into empowering knowledge through our participation in the group. The group enables us to integrate information into an identity of participation so we are able to enact knowledge as practice (Wenger, 1998). As a result the solidarity of our shared history of practice is being utilised instead of ignored. Where once despair flourished, determination blooms. I know I am where I need to be. And I know that I am not alone.

I feel a deep kinship with these colleagues and hope that a learning community is forming. We are *creating* knowledge by making space for wisdom that is marginalised within regimes of competence within the school. Wenger (1998, p. 217) states that:

when a learning community - secure in its history of participation but encouraged and humbled by its excursions of non-participation - turns its searching gaze upon itself, it is mostly in the potential of its marginalities that it must look for the promise of unrealized wisdoms.

There is a sense we are all working towards a more inclusive future for our school, on many different levels. Plans are percolating. Not the type of plans that need to be formalised into appraisal goals, or acknowledged by titles or reward, but quiet acts of empowerment and advocacy. It leaves me hopeful that we are on the threshold of a period of significant change, signalling what may be subtle, yet powerful shifts that enable voices at the margins to speak and be heard.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The focus of this research was to investigate the influence of social learning systems on my counsellor identity development and then to examine how reflective and reflexive practices enabled me to develop and/or transform my identity within social learning systems. This chapter gives an overview of what I have learned and recommendations for future research.

Counselling social learning systems have influenced my counsellor identity in a variety of ways. I was enabled me to participate on the periphery of counselling practice without the demands of being a full-member and this lead to me developing an identity of competence. I was also able to develop an identity of participation through mutual recognition, which enabled me to engage with others to negotiate the meaning of practices and develop an identity in relation to those practices. Participating in a social learning system also facilitated my use of imagination to construct a future identity as a counsellor.

At times counselling social learning systems influenced my counsellor identity in ways that were very challenging. In one CoP I was pushed into an identity of non-participation by what Wenger (1998, p. 166) would term “marginality”. In another CoP I felt a sense of powerlessness and incompetence at not being skilled enough to meet the needs of an ethnically diverse range of clients. Unexpectedly I also experienced how clients chose to use my identity within counselling sessions. Although the influence of social learning systems on my identity development as a counsellor was initially significant, my identity as a counsellor emerged from dynamic

interactions between my experiences in social learning systems, and reflective and reflexive practices.

Reflective and reflexive practices enabled me to revisit my identity experiences in counselling social learning systems and as a result develop and/or transform my identity as a counsellor. The practice of supervision enabled me to strengthen an identity of competence. The introspective practices of reading of poetry and meditation brought new awareness so I could view my identity experiences differently. When reading poetry I resonated with someone else's experience and was *re-minded* of my experience on a sensory level, which increased my awareness of what was actually occurring in the social learning system and the impact on my identity. Reading the wisdom contained in a poem enabled me to look at my situation with fresh eyes, and this led me to practice the skill of sorrow, which allowed new growth in my identity to occur.

Meditation practice increased my awareness of my own mindset and reactions. I could see how attached I was to my views and how I was being judgemental and dismissive of the practices of others. Meditation opened me to new perspectives and enabled me to embrace different viewpoints, becoming more positive and less judgemental. As I became less self-centered I also became less concerned about my individual identity as a counsellor and more interested in how to be of use in wider community of counsellors and minority populations. Meditation practice also increased my determination to learn new skills, concentration and my sense of agency. I was able to develop an identity of participation through working with others, and that identity enabled me to reach beyond my own circumstances to help create change.

I do not claim to “have got it right” merely by linking the personal to the cultural and like many auto ethnographers I still have “questions, doubts and ethical concerns” (Douglas & Carless, 2013). As I reach the end of this project I am left pondering some key points. My intention was to produce a research project that reflected my direct lived experiences in a way that was peaceful. I am aware there is an inbuilt tension within the research because the social learning systems were located within institutions and also that this is not a thesis critiquing institutional processes *per se*: it is my experiences within them. I also wonder if, (even though it was not deemed necessary), a formal ethics application would have strengthened the research. Furthermore, I can see now how this research is framed by many experiences and conversations, some of which are yet to occur.

This research shows how social learning systems can influence counsellor identity development. It also highlights that reflective and reflexive practices can mitigate some of the unintended or more challenging aspects of practice that occur within social learning systems. The practice of supervision helped develop my counsellor identity, while the introspective practices of reading poetry and meditation enabled me to transform my identity as a counsellor. Future research is needed to investigate the efficacy of introspective forms of reflective and reflexive practice for counsellors, in particular the need to go beyond language and thought to experience practice. There is also limited research by individual trainee counsellors describing their experiences in social learning systems. More research in this area could highlight individual needs that are not captured through other research models.

In terms of my own counsellor identity development, the research has shown me that the most important thing I can do on my journey as a counsellor is to maintain meditation practice. In doing so, hopefully, as I participate in social learning systems it will enable me to practice the wisdom contained in Dhammika's (2010, p. 43) translation of verse 142 from the Dhammapada:

Look not to the faults of others,
nor to their omissions and commissions.
But rather look to your own acts,
to what you have done and left undone.

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